

The Informed Victorian Reader

by

Christie A. P. Allen

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Doctoral Committee:

Associate Professor Daniel S. Hack, Chair  
Professor Lucy Hartley  
Professor Adela N. Pinch  
Associate Professor Megan L. Sweeney

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## Abstract

How did Victorian readers choose what to read, and why should this matter? Studies of Victorian reading practices have explored which texts Victorian readers chose to read and how they interpreted them, but scholars have generally neglected the actual processes through which readers became informed about and made their reading selections, as well as the Victorians' discursive treatment of those processes. Addressing this lapse, I argue that from the Victorians' perspective, the ways readers selected books had a profound effect on their reading experiences, shaping how they understood texts' meanings, developed relationships with books, and characterized themselves as readers.

To investigate this overlooked aspect of reading in the nineteenth century, I draw on a variety of sources from the Victorian period, including metadata, literary representations of readers, and nonfiction prose that addresses book selection, by figures such as John Stuart Mill, Henry Morley, Mark Pattison, and John Ruskin. These sources provide a rich sense of the varied ways in which Victorian readers came across books and made book selections, including searching through catalogues, following others' recommendations, and browsing book stall shelves or stacks of books at home. I outline two divergent attitudes circulating in Victorian publications about book selection, one advocating readers' purposeful pursuits of information about books, arranged by educated individuals, and the other celebrating the many ways readers could approach literature from outside of the formal infrastructure of information.

The nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century texts that feature most prominently in my analysis of Victorian book selection habits include the catalogues of Mudie's library from the 1850s

through the 1930s, as well as a number of novels and poems: Arnold Bennett's *Riceyman Steps* (1923), Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1856), Robert Browning's *The Ring and the Book* (1868-69), George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), Charles Kingsley's *Alton Locke* (1850), Ouida's *The Tower of Taddeo* (1892), and Mark Rutherford's *Clara Hopgood* (1896). I conclude the dissertation by bringing into the present the Victorians' concerns about informed reading, analyzing Rebecca Mead's *My Life in Middlemarch* (2014) to study the relationship between expert guidance on texts and emotional identification with texts.

## Introduction

Readers depicted in Victorian literature come by their books in many ways. When Henry Ryecroft, the protagonist of George Gissing's semi-autobiographical *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (1903), finds a first edition of Edward Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* in a bookshop, he puts forth extraordinary effort to obtain it. Having already forgone food to save money for just such a book, Ryecroft makes three trips across London to make it his: one to retrieve his money, and then two more to lug the many-volume work home.<sup>1</sup> Once finished with his epic journeys, Ryecroft flops into a chair, "perspiring, flaccid, aching—exultant!" The work remains a treasured volume for years but is eventually sold out of necessity; regretting the sale in later life while in more prosperous conditions, Ryecroft never purchases another copy of the Gibbon, because "it would not be to [him] what that other was, with its memory of dust and toil." Where hard work forges a special connection between Ryecroft and his Gibbon, the heroine of Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1855), Margaret Hale, finds solace in a book passage that she comes upon effortlessly. "In her nervous agitation" from life's compounding difficulties, the narrator relates, "she unconsciously opened a book of her father's that lay upon the table [and] the words that caught her eye in it, seemed almost made for her present state."<sup>2</sup> Buoyed by both the perceived relevance of the book's message and the serendipity of its discovery, Margaret takes it to heart and finds courage to face her challenges. Another fictional Victorian, Tom Pinch of Charles Dickens's *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843-44), is beguiled by books through neither herculean effort nor chance, but by the clever design of a bookseller's window display. Attracted by the sight of "spick-and span new works

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<sup>1</sup> Gissing, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, 39-41.

<sup>2</sup> Gaskell, *North and South*, vol. 2, 218-19.



from London, with the title-pages, and sometimes even the first page of the first chapter, laid wide open,” Tom notes that “unwary men” might begin to read the book, “and then, in the impossibility of turning over, . . . rush blindly in, and buy it!”<sup>3</sup> “What a heartbreaking shop it was!” Tom concludes, his longing for books made acute by the contrast between his detailed, lingering observations of the books in the shop window and his inability to purchase them.

For Henry Ryecroft, Margaret Hale, and Tom Pinch, the experience of reading a book—or of not reading a book—is shaped in part by how they access the book and by the information they possess as they make selections. Going without food in anticipation of such a book as Gibbon’s, and sweating to bring it home, forever gives the book special consequence for Ryecroft; knowing little about a book before reading it enhances its significance for Margaret; the bookseller’s window display both heightens Tom’s love for the books he sees and distances him from the books, as he finds himself wary of being manipulated. Each character’s relationship to a book begins before he or she can even start to read it, framed by the circumstances of the encounter.

In “The Informed Victorian Reader,” I consider Victorian reading experiences as complexly situated. As these examples suggest, and as I demonstrate throughout the dissertation, the Victorians believed that the ways readers chose reading material, and the ways readers were informed—or not informed—about texts, had a profound effect on reading itself. These processes were thought to shape how readers understood texts’ meanings, connected affectively with books, and were characterized *as* readers. Bringing to light this understudied element of Victorian reading history, the chapters that follow explore a series of interrelated questions that the Victorians themselves posed about selection, information, and reading: How do readers’ methods of selecting what to read within a text, or which book to read among books, determine how they feel about reading, or how others see them as readers? How does a reader’s prior information about a text influence the ways he or

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<sup>3</sup> Dickens, *The Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit*, 54.

she understands it? To what extent does the source of that information matter, and why? How do the material and emotional circumstances of a reader's encounter with a book determine what the reader gets out of the text? To answer these questions, I take a varied methodological approach, looking at both the ways Victorians organized information about books and the ways they reflected on that organization.

As is evident in Gissing's, Gaskell's, and Dickens's portrayal of book selection, interest in informed reading surfaces in Victorian representations of and discussions about many of the settings in which readers might encounter and learn about books. Such settings include diverse locations, such as the home, the shelves of a bookshop or book stall, the library, and schools. They also encompass diverse sources of information about books, from metadata and commentary in catalogues and critical reviews, to "information" more loosely considered, such as the assortment of details a reader in a bookshop might inadvertently pick up from the physical appearance of books on the shelves and the presence of other customers. A preoccupation with the nature of readers' meeting with books appears across nineteenth-century print culture, from periodicals and newspaper editorials to novels and poems. Throughout the dissertation, I outline two broadly divergent attitudes circulating about book selection in these publications, one advocating readers' purposeful pursuits of information about books, arranged by educated, cultured individuals, and the other celebrating the many ways readers could approach literature from outside of the formal infrastructure of information.

The Victorians' broad interest in the topic stems at least in part from changes in print culture in the nineteenth century. Many Victorian commentators compared the literature of their time to vast and quickly moving water, depicting an anxiety that the broad scope and relentless pace of print circulation was out of control and would give readers little time, ability, or incentive to make careful choices. In 1834, for instance, the bibliographer William Lowndes compared his bibliography of

literature to a compass, without which readers “would be floating on the immense ocean of literature.”<sup>4</sup> A contributor to the *Times* in 1864 writes of the “deluge” of fiction coming out on the literary market each year.<sup>5</sup> Mudie’s circulating library was both praised for bringing “the ebb and flow of the London literary wave” to the provinces and criticized, along with W. H. Smith’s book stalls, for being the “literary drinking-fountain” from which the “constant supply of new books . . . flows” without discrimination.<sup>6</sup> All of this print proliferated in the nineteenth century through the combined effects of the declining cost of paper production and the repeal of taxes on knowledge, improvements in printing speed, developments in the infrastructure used to transport books and newspapers, and the growing audience for print through the spread of literacy.<sup>7</sup> The growth of print also meant an increase in the number of ways one could obtain print, which created its own opportunities and worries. The railway bookstalls that popped up along with the railways, for example, were thought to promote both heaps of trashy literature and hasty selection, the lightness of the literature reflected in the flippancy with which a busy, distracted railway traveler would purchase, read, and discard it.<sup>8</sup>

The sense of drowning in literature was not new or unique to the Victorians—as Ann Blair has shown in her study of information during the early modern period, the problem of too much print had plagued many earlier eras.<sup>9</sup> But despite not being new, textual overload had important implications for the Victorians. Not only, as the above quotes suggest, did the Victorians *believe* theirs was a unique period of growing print and of growing places to find books, they also

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<sup>4</sup> Lowndes, *The Bibliographer’s Manual of English Literature*, vi.

<sup>5</sup> “Novels,” *The Times*, 30 Dec. 1864.

<sup>6</sup> “Going to Mudie’s,” *London Society*, 1869; Pattison, “Books and Critics,” *The Fortnightly Review*, 1877.

<sup>7</sup> As Jonathan Rose notes, the growth in books was astonishing: “Publishing trade journals reported only about 300 book titles issued annually in the first years of the century, surging to nearly 3,000 by 1842 and about 8,000 by 1897.” He also notes that these numbers are likely underestimated! (See “Education, Literacy, and the Victorian Reader,” 31-32.) For more on the historical causes of the increase in print, see Chapters One and Two of Brown, *Victorian News and Newspapers*; Feather, *A History of British Publishing*; Piper, *Dreaming in Books: The Making of the Bibliographic Imagination in the Romantic Age*, 3; and Chapter One of Welsh, *George Eliot and Blackmail*.

<sup>8</sup> For more on the psychology of railway reading, see Hammond, “Sensation and Sensibility: W.H. Smith and the Railway Bookstall.”

<sup>9</sup> Blair, *Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age*, 11.

responded to the “deluge” with new initiatives. Sensitive to how reading created and reflected a moral society—and supported a robust literary economy—writers, critics, booksellers, publishers, librarians, educators, and government officials attempted to organize readers’ access to books.

Contributing to what Margaret Hedstrom and John Leslie King describe as the “epistemic infrastructure”—a broad nineteenth-century effort to refine how knowledge in a modern world was made available in museums, libraries, and universities—Victorians launched state-sponsored efforts to better attach information to books and help readers make choices.<sup>10</sup> These efforts included the Public Libraries Act of 1850, which gave working- and middle-class people a place to select reading with a librarian’s assistance, and the refinement of the British Museum Reading Room throughout the century, which included, as my first chapter will discuss, an enormous, cross-referenced catalogue for researchers.<sup>11</sup> Other efforts, such as increasingly sophisticated book advertising and bookshop window displays, were commercially motivated attempts to draw readers’ attention to certain books or elements of books and to help them navigate a burgeoning book market. For example, through the *Publishers’ Circular*, begun in 1837, London publishers annually circulated a massive, compiled list of recent publications, in order to provide “some channel in which all persons interested in literature might be certain of seeing the first announcement of every new Literary undertaking.”<sup>12</sup> Still other efforts, such as the increasing numbers of book reviews available in periodicals, reflected the growing professionalism of literary criticism, as both a career for critics and, as critic Mark Pattison described it, a public service to steer readers away from the “ignorant, indolent, and vulgar” reading options available.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Hedstrom and King, “Epistemic Infrastructure in the Rise of the Knowledge Economy,” 120.

<sup>11</sup> For more on public libraries, see Alistair Black, *A New History of the English Public Library: Social and Intellectual Contexts, 1850-1914*. For a discussion of the Reading Room catalogue, see Blake, “Forging the Anglo-American Cataloging Alliance: Descriptive Cataloging, 1830-1908,” 3-22.

<sup>12</sup> See the front matter of *The Publishers’ Circular*, 1837.

<sup>13</sup> Pattison, “Books and Critics,” 1877.

As is suggested in this brief survey of the types of book organization that sprung up during this period, concerns about book selection and informed reading in the Victorian period contributed to many changes in the literary sphere. Debates about and representations of informed reading shaped book trade agreements, legislation on public libraries, educational strategies, and theories of artistic development during the Victorian period. “The Informed Victorian Reader” argues that these developments were shaped by conflicting ideas about the extent to which readers should be guided in their reading selection and who or what should guide them. Many Victorian commentators, Pattison being one, believed that readers selecting reading material should turn to educated, cultured individuals for information, as well as to the informational resources created and approved by those individuals, such as catalogues, book reviews, and textbooks. These guides brought readers to texts in an orderly fashion and grounded them in a text’s discursive history; they likewise encouraged a certain degree of intentionality in readers’ attitudes toward choosing reading, intentionality thought to facilitate appropriate understanding. It was in this vein of thought, as my dissertation will detail, that booksellers with much education and culture could assert their literary guidance of customers as second in importance only to the spiritual guidance of preachers, and catalogers could declare a reader’s approach to a catalogue to be a litmus test of his or her intelligence.

If advocates of more formal, purposeful selection processes predicated “informed reading” on the idea that readers be instructed by other readers with more knowledge, advocates of more democratic approaches to selection implicitly redefined what it means to be informed about books, and who provides that information. For some, this simply meant organizing informational resources with users in mind—for example, attempting to guess how a reader might instinctively use a catalogue and designing it accordingly, rather than designing the catalogue as a test of whether readers could anticipate the “correct” terms to find a book entry. Book advertisements also straddled a line between informing readers and being informed by them: if advertising methods, like

that of the bookseller whose window attracts Tom Pinch, were designed to shape others' views of books, they also took into consideration readers' preferences and traits in their advertisements.

Others relished the ways readers could altogether avoid, neglect, or rework the information they might be offered about literature. In his discourse about young women's reading, for instance, John Ruskin argues that instructing girls on which books to select only hinders their infallible feminine instinct. Margaret Hale's immediate attachment to the book passage she comes across serves as one example of such instinct at work. Each chapter of the dissertation analyzes not only the different positions commentators took on the dichotomy, but also the inevitable interplay of orderly, authorized information-seeking and more haphazard, errant methods. Much as Henry Ryecroft selects Gibbon initially for Gibbon's status (knowledge he likely gained from his formal education about books), but values *his* edition of Gibbon for the personal effort he made to obtain the volumes, other readers' encounters with a book were often framed as mixed experiences. As we shall see, as readers searched through catalogues, considered others' recommendations, and browsed book collections, their selections were both determined by other readers and self-determined, both shaped by authority figures and by their own interests, emotions, and situated encounters with books.

The study of Victorian approaches to book selection is timely, given both the emergence of information studies in recent decades and current scholarly concerns about the purpose of reading and literary expertise in our diversely media-saturated society. The attention I give to Victorian book selection builds on previous scholarship on the history of reading and the history of the book, while contributing a new angle, by both expanding the temporal scale of reading to include selection and narrowing the focus of analysis to the contextual factors that inform reading. Although selection is in the background of many scholarly studies, scholars have generally not been as observant of the shifts in Victorian culture regarding (un)informed selection as the Victorians were themselves; work

has more often been focused on what was being read, by whom, and how, rather than on how books were encountered by readers to begin with. I argue that by attending to this absence, we gain a more nuanced understanding of how the Victorians perceived the value and uses of their own literature, as well as a more nuanced understanding of information and reading in our own time.<sup>14</sup>

Noting the increase in print during the Victorian period, as discussed above, many scholars of nineteenth-century reading have characterized the Victorian period as the first “information age,” a predecessor to our own information-saturated society. They see in the era not only a growth of print, but also a growing demand for print to carry information to its readers, citing modern developments that created a need for information and produced new means for managing it: advances in science and technology, the spread of trade and empire, the emergence of sociology that unearthed information about the criminal and lower classes, and the move toward a democratic, educated citizenry.<sup>15</sup> In the literary world, the importance of information was pervasive enough that even fiction, as Richard Menke argues, “could begin imagining itself as a medium and information system”; Menke’s study of the novel as a container of information advances a line of inquiry

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<sup>14</sup> Paul Fyfe discusses how the chaos of Victorian print culture made access to literature, particularly the cheaply printed literature that appealed to the working classes, quite random. His is one of the only focused studies of selection in the nineteenth century that I have encountered (see “The Random Selection of Victorian New Media,” 1-23). Arguing that book selection is a much-neglected aspect of book history, Edward Jacobs has illuminated some of the ways book selection occurred in the eighteenth century (see “Buying into Classes: The Practice of Book Selection in Eighteenth-Century Britain,” 43-64). Roger Chartier, Leah Price, and others are also in various ways attentive to selection, and I engage with their specific points in the dissertation. In their guide for readers of the 1940s, *How to Read a Book*, Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren address informed reading by discussing various kinds of aids to textual understanding, including many of those I consider in the dissertation: reliance on personal experience, comparisons with other books, and expert commentaries (see chapter twelve). But their work does not consider the material conditions of a reader’s first encounter with a book or the specific mental processes involved in book selection, nor do they focus on reading in the Victorian period. What Robert Darnton argued in 1990—that the phase of the historical life cycle of a book that is most understudied is the role of the bookseller, or more broadly put, the site of dissemination to the reader—still seems true (see Darnton, “What Is the History of Books?,” 107-135). “The Informed Victorian Reader” engages with one facet of that phase, which is the kind of information Victorian readers have about texts when they go to the bookseller (or library, bookshelf, catalogue, etc.) to select a book, and how they make use of the information they gather when they are there.

<sup>15</sup> For more on the Victorian period as an information age, see Headrick, *When Information Came of Age: Technologies of Knowledge in the Age of Reason and Revolution, 1700-1850*; Mattelart, *Networking the World*; Menke, *Telegraphic Realism: Victorian Fiction and Other Information Systems*; Nunberg, *The Future of the Book*; and Welsh’s *George Eliot and Blackmail*.

pioneered by Alexander Welsh in the 1980s.<sup>16</sup> However, the Victorians' efforts to organize access to books in order to guide selection and reading have been largely overlooked in this scholarly vein. "The Informed Victorian Reader" reframes the Victorian period as an "age of information" *about* books, as well as an age of information through or within them.

My study of information about books in the Victorian period is partly prompted by developments in twentieth- and twenty-first-century information studies. Literary scholars may often be more inclined to focus on their research findings than on the information infrastructure that facilitates those findings. But a growing number of information scholars are attending to how information about books—manifest in print and digital metadata, in shelf arrangements, in the ways librarians interact with patrons—shapes readers' experiences with what they read. As these information scholars argue, those who organize information about books interpret literature and other artifacts for the public, occupying an often-unnoticed but privileged role in crafting cultural history.<sup>17</sup> What we now know and value about information from information studies can sharpen literary scholars' understanding of information in Victorian book history, both as the Victorians viewed it and as we might see it in retrospect.

As a study of readers' encounters with books, my work is indebted to scholars who have emphasized the need to view reading in the context of, or in competition with, the material forms that envelop texts. Roger Chartier has laid much historical and conceptual groundwork for projects like mine. Chartier illuminates a mutually influential relationship between semantic texts, the formatting and presentation of books, and readers' reading habits through the eighteenth century. He analyzes the tensions between the "constraints and obligations" that texts and book forms exert on readers and the "rebellious and vagabond" nature of readers who interpret the text. Although

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<sup>16</sup> Menke, *Telegraphic Realism*, 3.

<sup>17</sup> For examples of such an approach to information, see Cook, "What Is Past Is Prologue," 45-46 and Duff, et al., "Contexts Built and Meaning Found: A Pilot Study on the Process of Archival Meaning-Making."



Chartier's focus is primarily on the act of reading itself, Victorian readers' selection processes can be usefully understood through a similar framework: readers' choices are influenced by texts and by the containers in which texts are presented, even as readers bring their own histories and character to bear on that information, leading to the central conflict I assert underlies Victorian definitions of informed reading.<sup>18</sup> Through his concept of "paratext," Gérard Genette has explicated the many kinds of information readers might acquire about a text not only from the materiality of the book that contains it, but also from the written text surrounding it, such as the title page or the cover design.<sup>19</sup> Paratext obviously played a central role in how Victorian readers chose texts when they were presented with the spines of books on a table or shelf or when leafing through a pile of books, behaviors considered especially in my third chapter. My analysis of Victorian catalogues, as lists of the types of information expressed through paratext—author names and book titles—also draws particularly on Genette's argument that these pieces of data form part of the texts themselves.

However, in looking at the relationship between text, book, and reader specifically in moments of selection, and in conceptualizing the role of information in the selection process, this dissertation offers a more multilayered view of reading than many other book history studies. While analyses like Genette's are useful in drawing attention to elements outside of texts, they still imagine the material context of texts mainly in terms of book covers, typeface, and so forth; for his purposes, Genette limits himself, he acknowledges, to imagining texts as they are "offered to a docile reader."<sup>20</sup> Although the "rebellious" reader is a critical part of Chartier's triangle of textual interpretation, Chartier, too, primarily analyzes texts to which readers respond or against which they rebel in terms of printed matter and the material of the book that encloses it. Following the Victorians' cue, I frame information about books more sweepingly, considering, to the extent possible in any one

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<sup>18</sup> Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, vi-viii.

<sup>19</sup> Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 3.

analysis, all the types of information that frame a text. Beyond paratext, readers in my analysis are informed by the elements that emerge in interactions with books, which include information beyond the author's or publisher's purview in producing a book object, such as which other books surround a book when a reader finds it, or the demeanor of a bookseller who first brings a book to a reader's notice. Especially in the later three chapters, this dissertation thus moves outward from traditional studies of a closed circuit between the text, the book, and the reader engaging with what the fixed book and text offer, to consider more of the nuances that prime readers' encounters. In so doing, "The Informed Victorian Reader" aligns with work by scholars such as Robert Darnton, Bruno Latour, and Stephen Colclough, who argue for the importance of viewing book circulation, reading, and knowledge production as dependent on a range of human agents and non-human factors, and as situated in particular times and places.<sup>21</sup>

While my study of Victorian selection habits speaks to the relationship between text and book, it also speaks to scholarship highlighting the divide that sometimes emerges between readers' use of books as objects and their use of books as texts. As scholars like D.F. McKenzie and Leah Price have suggested, even if texts are written to be read, readers may put them to many other uses besides reading, using texts and books as symbols of power, as shields from the prying gaze of others, as decoration, and so on.<sup>22</sup> On the one hand, the ways some Victorian readers were thought to select books supports to an extent the idea that books can be used entirely as objects, not texts: as I discuss in Chapter Two, for instance, by the late Victorian period, books were often displayed in bookshops as objects, booksellers relying on books' colors and shapes as much as their contents to entice customers. On the other hand, other elements of book selection reframe the divide between text and book as a matter of temporal sequence rather than as a matter of fixed, definite difference.

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<sup>21</sup> See Darnton, *The Kiss of Lamourette: Reflections in Cultural History*; Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*; and Colclough, *Consuming Texts: Readers and Reading Communities, 1695-1870*.

<sup>22</sup> McKenzie, "The Sociology of a Text: Oral Culture, Literacy, and Print in Early New Zealand"; Price, *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain*.

Readers in bookshops might first see books as so many objects on a shelf, but, in the course of conversation with a bookseller, may become interested in the contents of particular books; browsing readers, as I point out in Chapter Three, are often first depicted as engaging with books through a sense of sight and touch, oblivious to the words within, but this process gives way to, and even serves as a foundation for, textual engagement.

In addition to illuminating how a reader might negotiate the material and textual elements of books, Victorian representations of selection and informed reading grapple with the purpose of reading itself, an issue that is also at the heart of literary criticism today. Literary critics present different ideas about how reading is best done, by academic readers and by readers in general. From defenders of suspicious reading, to Michael Warner's critique of normative "critical reading" in academia, to Rita Felski's emphasis on affect as an integral part of reading experience, to Elaine Freedgood's "metonymic reading" and Sharon Marcus's "just reading," the questions of why readers read, how readers should orient themselves toward texts, and where they should look for evidence to support interpretations seem endlessly debatable.<sup>23</sup> This dissertation does not attempt to engage with each current theory of reading or interpretation or to propose its own ideal version of reading. But it does consider, from the Victorians' point of view, how embodied encounters with texts and the kinds of information readers bring to bear on a text factor into the purpose and outcome of their reading. What a represented reader or a commentator believes reading is for, I argue at several points in the dissertation, is partly reflected in and partly shaped by the way they approach and learn about a book, and about what counts as "expertise" in reading.<sup>24</sup> The Victorian examples I study suggest the importance of attending more to selection in our current discussions about the nature of reading, both inside and outside of academia.

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<sup>23</sup> See Warner, "Uncritical Reading," 13-38; Felski, *Uses of Literature*; Freedgood, *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel*; and Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England*.

<sup>24</sup> For the sake of convenience, at times in the dissertation I choose to use the singular "they" (rather than "he or she") as a pronoun to refer to individuals of unspecified gender.

Relatedly, this project contributes to scholarship that understands reading, its purposes and practices, as partly a function of the reader's identity. Early work by figures like Richard Altick illuminated the distinct nature of nineteenth-century working-class reading, a study taken up later by scholars like Jonathan Rose; Kate Flint has examined the common tropes of women's reading in Victorian England.<sup>25</sup> Along with many others, these scholars demonstrate how readers' access to books and education shape their reading and how their perceived identity places them under certain kinds of judgment for the reading they do. Book selection processes are also part of that story: the conflicts I outline between formal and haphazard, authorized and individualized selection methods are almost always linked to identity. The "approved" methods for choosing books or textual passages in Victorian England varied depending on the reader in question. A critic like Pattison was charged—or charged himself—with the pedagogical role of surveying all of literature to winnow down the choices for the masses, a right granted by social position. The idea of a Victorian woman or a street urchin surveying literature unguided was more loaded, suggesting to some the fulfillment of democratic ideals, and to others the danger of social upheaval and moral depravity. The Victorians' varying perspectives about who is authorized to select and guide reading, for themselves and for others, further reflect debates about reading selection and readers' identities in our moment. Readers of all identities now have more options for accessing, recommending, and commenting on literature through the Internet and their electronic devices; at the same time, literary academics are being compelled to justify to the public their value as selectors of, guides to, and preservers of literary culture. Like the Victorians, as a society we are attempting to determine the characteristics of an informed reader.

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<sup>25</sup> See Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public 1800-1900*; Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*; and Flint, *The Woman Reader, 1837-1914*.

“The Informed Victorian Reader” accordingly examines book selection and information partly in relation to Victorian and contemporary views about identity, involving questions of agency, class, gender, education, culture, modernization, and childhood development. Toward this effort, each chapter considers a particular group or groups of readers who select reading, or for whom reading is selected: the middle class, the young, the poor, the female, and the scholar of the Victorian age, and, in the final chapter, the twenty-first century reader and literary expert. Race and ethnicity are notably absent from this list of identity categories. Despite the vast colonial stakes of the Victorian British Empire and the contentiousness of race in the nineteenth century, in much of the print culture that overtly discusses book selection—in debates about cataloging, in debates about bookselling, in analyses of browsing’s merits—the readers imagined to be selecting books, as well as the figures imagined to be organizing information about books, are not racially or ethnically defined. Whiteness remains a presumed and relatively unmarked category in considerations of book selection and informed reading, especially compared with age, class, or gender. Yet, many of the types of metadata and literary texts I analyze hint at the role of race and ethnicity in readers’ experience of choosing books: for example, the colonial categorizations of literature in Mudie’s catalogues, the foreign settings of several of the works I consider (South Africa in Olive Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm* (1883), or Italy in Robert Browning’s *The Ring and the Book* (1868-69) and in Ouida’s *The Tower of Taddeo* (1892)), and the racially coded descriptions of some readers, like George Eliot’s gypsy-like, brown-skinned Maggie Tulliver. In this dissertation, I focus mainly on the categories of identity that more explicitly preoccupied commentators on book selection in Victorian print culture, and I do not take up race or ethnicity as a central axis of exploration. But fruitful scholarship may be done in the future on the intersection of race and ethnicity with the categories of identity I do examine, and on the striking elusiveness in the Victorian discourse on book selection regarding issues of race and ethnicity.

A few further clarifications on my terminology, sources, and historical and geographical framework may be useful here. As I have suggested, “The Informed Victorian Reader” takes an expansive view of the timeline of reading and of what constitutes information about a text. I look to the ways Victorians themselves depicted book selection and reading to determine what counted for them as sources of information about books. However, the Victorian writers I analyze do not always, or even usually, use the terms “selection” and “information” to characterize these processes. To bring out the coherence of Victorian conversations about informed reading across many sources, I have assigned these terms to what they are describing. Further, although in the above depictions I have framed book selection and becoming informed about books, and then subsequent reading, as sequential events, in practice they are of course often recursive and overlapping. Where a catalogue user might select a previously unknown book from a catalogue and then read it for the first time, for example, he or she might also select a book from the catalogue to *reread*; many readers read reviews and guides to a book *after* reading the book, prompted by curiosity to know what others think of it. In my analysis, I am concerned primarily with readers’ first encounters with books, although much of the influence of the selection and informing processes I discuss could apply to rereadings or to readers’ retrospective considerations of books. Additionally, while I argue that all of the informing factors in a reading experience matter, I have found it impossible to consider all of them in a single reading or even in a single dissertation. Out of necessity, I focus in each chapter on a different set of informing conditions. At times, I home in on the moment a reader selects a book, at other times on how a reader might actually read with another’s commentary in mind; I sometimes consider human interactions that facilitate book choices, and at other times more textually based mediators. By shifting my angle, I aim to flesh out a rich, if not complete, picture of informed reading.

Also partly out of necessity, this dissertation considers Victorian informed reading primarily through the lens of Victorians who wrote about it. It is impossible to observe firsthand how

Victorians selected their reading material and, as many historians of reading have noted, it is difficult to piece together the actual, embodied reading experiences of the past from historical records. Such ephemeral phenomena have to be approached through others' descriptions of them. However, my choice to analyze mainly written representations of selection and informed reading also coincides with the central interests of the project, which are, to begin with, less about the historical realities of reading and more about perceptions of those realities, and what Victorian perceptions about reading suggest about their values. Throughout the dissertation, I draw on both literary representations of selection, such as those I have cited by Gaskell, Gissing, and Dickens, and what might be termed non-literary print sources, such as newspaper editorials and journal articles. The conventions and audiences of each type of source shape their representations of reading. It is notable, for instance, that in imaginatively representing characters choosing books, Victorian novelists and poets seem consistently self-conscious about how their own books are encountered by readers, and how that process affects the ways readers will interpret and classify their writing. Booksellers' more prosaic discussions of how readers encounter books are, by contrast, tied to their concerns about protecting their own profession and livelihood. At the same time, I take the widespread representations of book selection and informed reading as indicative of shared interests as much as of divided interests among these parties, and I consider all of these representations to be fictional, or at least biased, to some extent. Accordingly, while at points the dissertation engages with the ways the genre of a piece of writing shapes its take on informed reading, in general I move relatively freely among literary and non-literary sources.

Although book selection and informed reading were particularly important to the Victorians for the reasons I have outlined, I have declined to attach a specific date range to this study. There are no two "information events," so to speak, that bookend the phenomena I describe—and as I suggest through my last chapter, which engages with a twenty-first century perspective on reading,

debates about what it means to be an informed reader of Victorian literature persist today. However, drawing attention to certain nodes in the history of book selection, most of “The Informed Victorian Reader” engages with the period from the 1840s through the first decades of the twentieth century. The 1840s represent one shift in how readers accessed books, marking the beginning of modern cataloging at the British Museum library, the founding of Mudie’s Library as a newly centralized repository of Victorian novels, and a decade in which printing and purchasing paper began to be cheaper. The 1880s and 1890s, where much of Chapter Two’s discussion of bookselling is situated, represent another important landmark period, when, as I will discuss, the book trade changed through the Net Book Agreement, the three-volume novel fell out of fashion, and the late Victorians began to reflect on what “Victorian” literature was—or had been. Though past what is conventionally considered the Victorian era, the few texts I consider from the twentieth century, including some catalogues and an Arnold Bennett novel, usefully delineate Victorian informed reading by consciously contrasting literature and reading in their own time with what they see as “Victorian.” I at times examine texts—such as Mudie’s catalogues, novels representing bookselling that were published in the 1890s, or journal articles about bookselling—as representative of fairly specific historical times within this range, because they quite evidently grapple with historical changes in certain institutions or trade groups. At other times, such as in my analysis of many Victorian-era novels and poems, I assume that texts engage less with the specifics of a particular year or decade than they reflect the gradual evolution of attitudes toward book selection and information. Finally, while I have for the sake of practicality chosen to focus on British reading experiences, attitudes and policies toward selection and information in Britain developed in relation to those in other places, especially the United States—many of the changes to libraries, catalogues, and bookselling in England, for example, were deliberately transatlantic efforts. At several moments throughout the dissertation, therefore, I draw on American as well as British sources.



“The Informed Victorian Reader” begins by analyzing the metadata through which Victorian novels were represented to potential readers searching for something to read. In Chapter One, I especially examine the catalogues of Mudie’s as facilitators of readers’ book selection. Seen in the context of a larger nineteenth-century discourse about cataloging, in which cataloging standards were debated with an eye toward different kinds of readers and their searching habits, Mudie’s catalogues can be understood as texts that strategically highlight certain aspects of fiction in attempts to guide readers through the library’s collection. As well as advocating a new use for book catalogues in literary scholarship, this chapter argues that in both shaping and reflecting anticipated readers’ assumptions and preferences, the catalogues complicate prevailing scholarly ideas about Victorian fiction. In particular, the nineteenth-century catalogues show new methods through which fiction and non-fiction could be framed in relation to each other, as well as challenging conventional views of authorship. The catalogues in the decade just following the Victorian era, I suggest, offer differently inflected interpretations of Victorian period boundaries and of Victorian genre divisions than those common in Victorian studies today.

Later chapters move from a study of organized, textual metadata to a study of the often messier information-seeking behaviors described in the newspapers, periodicals, and literature of the time. Chapter Two explores representations of bookselling practices in Victorian England in both trade journals and novels. Scholarly histories of Victorian bookselling have most often centered on the number and types of books in circulation during a time of expansive growth and commercialization in the book market. This chapter shifts the focus to how the sometimes-dismaying changes in the book market were thought to affect the ways customers in bookshops learned about books. Taking book trade journals and fiction as my primary material, I analyze the represented interactions between booksellers and customers. Drawing on educational theories offered by Pierre Bourdieu, I argue that in many cases, booksellers’ desire to uphold a dominant,

long-established literary and social culture through bookselling conflicts with booksellers' mandate to *inform* customers about books, especially when customers do not meet their lofty expectations. Attitudes toward the depth and extent of booksellers' information, and their manner of sharing it, reveal assumptions about what constitutes good reading and true readers. I explicate this conflict specifically through four novels portraying secondhand bookshops, which were a stronghold for old-fashioned bookselling techniques in the modern market: Charles Kingsley's *Alton Locke* (1850), Ouida's *The Tower of Taddeo* (1892), Mark Rutherford's *Clara Hopgood* (1896), and Arnold Bennett's *Riceyman Steps* (1923).

Whereas the first two chapters explore how information about books was curated for readers, in ways that both reflected readers' actual reading practices and attempted to control reading, Chapter Three examines unmediated book selection processes. I focus especially on depictions of one type of "unmediated" book selection, browsing—a term that, as I show, took on its modern meaning of perusing books during the nineteenth century—in Victorian nonfiction prose, poetry, and fiction. In this chapter, I bring out common themes about the nature of reading emerging from scenes of browsing in texts as diverse as Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1856), George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), and Robert Browning's *The Ring and the Book* (1868-69).

Anticipating a later twentieth- and twenty-first-century bias toward emotionally detached, critically contextualized reading, some Victorian commentators argued that browsers' lack of authoritative guidance, and their tendency to become absorbed in their reading material, led to misinterpretation, excessive susceptibility to texts, and laziness. However, I argue that works like Eliot's and the Brownings' challenge the prevalent assumption that readers must be detached from texts in order to exercise agency and become thoughtful reading subjects. They show, instead, how browsing can engender readers' ownership of books and their reading experiences *through* the unique kinds of physical and emotional attachments browsing fosters. In these representations of browsing, there is

something to be gained for readers even when, or perhaps precisely when, “full understanding” is precluded by the haphazard standards of a reader’s encounter with a book.

The final chapter of this dissertation brings into the present my analysis of the Victorians’ concerns about informed reading. Much as the Victorians framed book selection and guides to reading as important factors in reading experiences and in defining readers, readers’ relationship to Victorian literature today is shaped partly by how they encounter Victorian books. In this chapter, I analyze Rebecca Mead’s *My Life in Middlemarch* (2014), a readers’ guide of sorts to George Eliot’s novel, as an amalgam of the types of guidance surveyed throughout the dissertation. Filled with expert information, yet focused on readers’ emotional connection to and identification with *Middlemarch* and Eliot, Mead’s work, I argue, paradoxically attempts to mediate an unmediated reading experience for readers. In the process, I suggest, Mead bridges different scholarly camps on the purpose of reading and the role of information in reading today. I conclude the chapter with a brief analysis of the drawbacks and payoffs of different kinds of “informed reading,” in the Victorian period, in our own time, and in my own roles as a reader and a scholar.

## Chapter 1

### Mudie's Catalogues and the (Re)Writing of Victorian Literary History

In an 1869 issue of *London Society*, an anonymous contributor describes regular visits to Mudie's circulating library as an "institutional" habit of middle-class Victorian life.<sup>1</sup> As this author breathlessly depicts it, Mudie's headquarters in New Oxford Street is a daily circus of bookish activity, offering to acute observers, such as himself, a "kaleidoscopic" vision of various readers and their various books. On a given day at Mudie's, there are pleasure-seeking readers eager for a volume to "kill time." There are would-be reviewers hastening to get the first copies of new books, would-be famous authors anxiously inquiring about the popularity of their latest work, and friends of would-be successful authors planting requests for copies to boost circulation figures. There are readers about to take a trip, who are looking for books to read on vacation, and there are readers looking for books on fashion to improve their appearance. And there are also, the author briefly mentions, the "bookworms," those who are apparently oblivious to all of this activity and "who will sit down and pore over the catalogue, not heeding much what they read, so that they may satiate the mere love of reading."

The essay implies that the "bookworms" who read the catalogue are just one among many kinds of readers at Mudie's, as indeed they are, at least in terms of their intensive use of the catalogue at the site of the library itself. Yet, marginal as the catalogue appears in this lively scene, it is almost certain that most of the diverse patrons the author describes, as well as the thousands of other Mudie's subscribers in and outside of London, were consistent readers of the *Catalogue of New*

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<sup>1</sup> "Going to Mudie's," *London Society*, 1869. The author states that "Going to Mudie's' is an institution" (448).

*and Standard Works in Circulation at Mudie's Library*. Open access to the books for patrons visiting the libraries was limited, and many subscribers never actually visited the library sites at all. The only way for many to obtain books from Mudie's was to request them specifically, which suggests that most of Mudie's readers would doubtless have used the catalogue to make choices about what to borrow, making the catalogue the text most subscribers encountered before all of the other texts in the library.<sup>2</sup> But although the catalogues were pervasive in the "institution" of going to or ordering from Mudie's, they are mentioned only cursorily by Victorian commentators on the circulating library, as they are in this *London Society* article. Like the books in the catalogues that the Mudie's "bookworms" constantly devour—books which are yet unheeded in readers' thoughtless use of them to "sate the mere love of reading"—the catalogues themselves seem to have been constantly used but often unnoticed by many Victorian readers.

To a degree, the same could be said of scholars of Victorian literature (and of literature in other periods) today in regard to their use of catalogues. While book catalogues have been flagged as useful records of the circulation of texts, the catalogues are often treated as transparent containers of information. This chapter instead approaches the catalogues of Mudie's library, the period's dominant distributor of fiction to the middle classes, as a mediating force between literary institutions and readers, guides crafted during an era of especially intense debate about book cataloging as a means of both anticipating and shaping readers' views of books. Through their

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<sup>2</sup> Most libraries had closed stacks in the mid-nineteenth century, and open access did not become the norm until the twentieth century (Alistair Black, *A New History of the English Public Library*, 205-10). At Mudie's headquarters in London, books on the shelves were highly visible to patrons in the impressive gallery, but rather than collecting the books from the shelves, readers who opted not to have their orders delivered to their homes obtained books by picking up them up at the circulating desk or by sending a servant to the desk in their stead (see Griest, *Mudie's Circulating Library and the Victorian Novel*, 28-29). The front matter of Mudie's catalogues from the mid-nineteenth century until the library's closing in the 1930s delineates readers' responsibility for defraying carriage costs for delivering vans, suggesting that a good deal of the readership was obtaining books by delivery and was thus seeing the library's collection only as it was represented in the catalogue. As the 1931 edition states, the catalogue "is specially designed in order that Subscribers may, with quickness and facility, in their own homes, obtain an accurate knowledge of the unrivalled literary resources of the Library" (*Mudie's Catalogue of the Principal English Books in Circulation at the Library*, 1931)). The catalogues were issued in full and distributed to subscribers every January, with supplements published throughout the year and condensed lists advertised often in a range of publications.

structure and language, catalogues reflected and offered to readers—whether readers explicitly noted them or not—certain narratives about the literature they described. I argue that as records of how novels were viewed, Mudie’s catalogues in the Victorian and Edwardian eras nuance and in some cases challenge familiar scholarly accounts of Victorian fiction and its readership, highlighting at times a divergence between the priorities of critical and commercial institutions in categorizing fiction.

I make three main points about how to interpret Mudie’s catalogues as an intervention in our narrative of literary history. First, the catalogues’ organization plays a significant but hitherto unnoticed role in mediating the status of fiction in relation to non-fiction literature, as well as in advertising Mudie’s fiction collection as a cut above fiction generally during the nineteenth century. Second, the catalogues’ access points for fiction offer insight into readers’ familiarity with the authors and titles of fiction, qualifying the notion that the Victorian era saw “the rise of the author” by suggesting that it was also the time of the title. Finally, by introducing temporal arrangements and subject categories for novels, Mudie’s Edwardian catalogues put forth differently inflected interpretations of both the Victorian period and Victorian novel genres. In contrast to the more holistically based period and genre groups common in Victorian studies today, these choices reflect subscribers’ preferences for straightforward temporal contrasts of literature, as well as their tendency to think about novels in terms of their readily apparent but varied subject matters and settings.

### **Book catalogues and the history of reading at Mudie’s Library**

Mudie’s Circulating Library has long been recognized as a partial, indirect creator of literature, particularly of novels consumed by the middle classes, but its importance as a disseminator of fiction, and the catalogues’ role in that work, has been understudied. The library opened in London in 1842 and, as the *London Society* article indicates, quickly became a mainstay of the British literary market. Throughout the Victorian period, Mudie’s was the largest purchaser and

the dominant distributor of novels in the world, its success attributable to at least two factors. First, publishers kept the price of the ubiquitous three-volume novel prohibitively high, which meant that a typical middle-class reader could not afford to buy novels and instead subscribed to borrow from libraries like Mudie's, which were among publishers' main purchasers.<sup>3</sup> And second, the library's savvy founder, Charles Mudie, turned his personal taste and moral standards into a powerful advertising campaign, assuring middle-class readers that the library carried novels that were both popular and "select," meeting high standards.<sup>4</sup> As Guinevere Griest suggests, Mudie's was something of a silent author of much of Victorian fiction, since novelists (sometimes resentfully) strove to make their works conform to the patterns that would ensure admittance into the Mudie collection, and thus the best opportunity for circulation.<sup>5</sup>

Mudie's selectivity might be said to position the novels in the library's collection in what Pierre Bourdieu describes, in his theory of cultural production, as a literary "field." Within a broad field of literary works jostling for readers and recognition, Bourdieu suggests, works always gain a position through contrast with other works. Bourdieu argues that multiple agents in the literary field combine to give works "meaning and value."<sup>6</sup> These agents include not just authors, the traditional creators of literature, but all those involved in the creation and presentation of works, such as journals, publishers, critics, academies, and, most relevant here, libraries. As Griest and others have established, Mudie's institution as a whole was one of the significant agents that helped to produce Victorian fiction, the stock itself carrying certain "meaning and value" through the very fact of Mudie's having chosen it.

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<sup>3</sup> See Griest, *Mudie's Circulating Library*, 1; Menke, "The End of the Three-Volume Novel System, 27 June 1894"; and Shattock, "The Publishing Industry," 7.

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of Mudie's overall techniques of self-presentation, see Roberts, "Trafficking in Literary Authority: Mudie's Select Library and the Commodification of the Victorian Novel." This chapter will further explore the catalogues' role in this advertising effort.

<sup>5</sup> See Griest *Mudie's Circulating Library*, 2-5.

<sup>6</sup> Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 37.

Because its influence over publications and nearly exclusive control over the circulation of new fiction declined after 1894 when the library's mainstay, the three-volume novel, fell out of fashion, Mudie's is usually thought of as a Victorian institution. But Mudie's remained a major distributor of fiction to the British public in the early twentieth century, the collection continuing to grow and business continuing to flourish at the library through the Edwardian period. Mudie's did not close its doors until 1937, when it collapsed due to competition in the 1920s and early 1930s with public libraries and the new two-penny libraries.<sup>7</sup> In advertisements during the library's operating years in the twentieth century, Mudie's combined its previous self-promotion of the current-ness of its literature with an emphasis on its age. Its catalogue preface claimed not only that Mudie's was fully stocked with daily additions of the most current literature but also that the library was "the oldest institution of its kind in the world," underscoring the fact that the library held "books that have stood the test of time," many of which were out of print and "unobtainable" anywhere but Mudie's.<sup>8</sup>

Given Mudie's size, popularity, longevity, and acknowledged status as a gatekeeper for fiction, the library's catalogue can usefully be viewed as a window into which fictional works achieved middle-class legitimacy in the Victorian and Edwardian periods. Scholars have indeed used catalogues like Mudie's to assess the position of works or bodies of literature at a given time. Since catalogues include all of the works a library circulated, including those that were ultimately excluded from the literary canon and relatively forgotten by later eras, studying catalogues' contents gives scholars a more complete picture of a literary field during a period. Because, as Bourdieu suggests, literary works achieve meaning and status always in relation to or competition with the other works in the field, being more thoroughly aware of the range of circulated texts better enables scholars to

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<sup>7</sup> Newspaper articles published when Mudie's closed in 1937 reflect on the library's prominence during the Edwardian period. See, for example, "Add English Tragedies," *The Globe and Mail*, 17 July 1937, and "Alas for Mudies!," *The New York Times*, 16 July 1937.

<sup>8</sup> "Preface to the Catalogue," *Catalogue of the Principal English Books in Circulation at Mudie's Select Library*, 1911.



understand how any particular work was valued.<sup>9</sup> As Jacob Edwards argues in his study of eighteenth-century circulating library catalogues, studies of catalogues' content show us "the lived culture" of books, "the past as it appeared to the people who lived and made it."<sup>10</sup> Considered alongside large-scale data on publication gathered retrospectively, such as the work of William St. Clair on the Romantic period, catalogues can add another side to the story, revealing, for example, when books that were not republished were nevertheless reread for decades by some communities. In Victorian culture in particular, when books were more often borrowed than bought, Clarence Gohdes suggests, catalogues may offer a more accurate picture of the history of reading than sales figures.<sup>11</sup> Gohdes performed one of the few analyses of Mudie's catalogues in the 1940s, pointing to the presence of American works in the catalogue as evidence of Victorian interest in literature on the other side of the Atlantic. Using a similar logic, other scholars have turned to the catalogue to learn what was actually being circulated in the Victorian and other periods.<sup>12</sup>

However, as the *London Society's* reference to the "bookworms" "por[ing] over the catalogue" suggests, Mudie's catalogue was itself read by readers, not only representing other books but also functioning as a book to be handled, pored over, flipped through, circulated. As one commentator suggested in a nostalgic reminiscence when Mudie's closed in the 1930s, the catalogue was a defining feature of a Mudie's reader's experience, as "he read [at home] in quiet, choosing his books in

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<sup>9</sup> See Johnson's introduction to Bourdieu's *The Field of Cultural Production*, 12.

<sup>10</sup> Edwards, "Eighteenth-Century British Circulating Libraries and Cultural Book History," 17.

<sup>11</sup> Gohdes, "British Interest in American Literature During the Latter Part of the Nineteenth Century as Reflected by Mudie's Select Library," 356.

<sup>12</sup> For example, in her study of the English novel in India during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Priya Joshi uses library catalogues for "data" on trends in the publication and collection of English and Indian works (*In Another Country*, 144). Other literary scholars who similarly use catalogues for informative circulation or publication figures include Jack Capps, *Emily Dickinson's Reading* and Cristanne Miller, *Reading in Time: Emily Dickinson in the Nineteenth Century*. Even in works that are attentive to how catalogues are structured, the interpretive work that metadata does can be underplayed. For instance, in her recent, impressive study of information management strategies in the early modern period, Ann Blair studies patterns of organization in the reference works, but still asserts that the compilers were "conveyers of information rather than of their own opinions or positions" and did not "offer a contextual interpretation of the material they selected" (*Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age*, 2).

advance from a catalogue.”<sup>13</sup> As another commentator noted, perhaps Mudie’s largest influence had been in the provinces, where remote readers “selected books by the box from a catalogue.”<sup>14</sup> To reconstruct a history of Victorian and Edwardian reading, it is important to ask not only which books catalogues listed, but also *how* they did so. What does the arrangement of the metadata on a particular book reveal about attitudes toward it? How are the works within a collection made to relate to each other, and how are they differentiated in the effort to help readers make selections among many possible options? How does the presentation of Victorian fiction change over time, throughout and beyond the period, and why?

To examine Mudie’s catalogues in this way puts Bourdieu’s theory of cultural production to new use in the study of literary history. Bourdieu generally does not include catalogues as one of the agents in the literary field, featuring instead other figures as the central actors and treating catalogues as incidentals whose contents simply illuminate how other agents acted. For example, he makes use of the contents of publishers’ lists to compare the works different publishers supported, as a means of assessing how a publisher’s support of a particular kind of literature lent cultural capital to its works, but does not closely consider the metadata in the lists themselves. Like other scholars, he overlooks the ways catalogues organize literature, the informative details about the literature the metadata provides, and the language catalogues use to frame their choices in representing works.<sup>15</sup>

As well as acknowledging the library as an agent of production through its selection of literature and the catalogues’ value in displaying the works the library supported, my reading turns to catalogues as texts and agents in their own right.<sup>16</sup> The catalogues do the work that Bourdieu argues

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<sup>13</sup> “Alas for Mudies!,” *The New York Times*, 16 July 1937.

<sup>14</sup> “Add English Tragedies,” *The Globe and Mail*, 17 July 1937.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Bourdieu’s discussion of the amount and longevity of book sales by “commercial” versus “cultural” publishers, in which he presumably draws on records from publishers’ lists to ascertain which works the publishers supported at a given time (*The Field of Cultural Production*, 97-101).

<sup>16</sup> Frank de Glas notes that the role of publishers, and specifically publishers’ lists, is an important but often overlooked aspect of the creation of artistic value, one which Bourdieu attended to but which scholars have underplayed. I propose

cultural agents do, making audiences “capable of knowing and recognizing [a] work of art,” through mapping out relationships among works *within* the collection.<sup>17</sup> For example, the catalogues rhetorically compare fiction to other genres and argue both for a hierarchy among the genres and for mutually beneficial connections among them; establishing how features of individual works, such as their author names and titles, relate to or even compete with each other as access points for readers, the catalogues suggest how various facets of texts contribute differently to the framing of a literary work. Giving specific contours to the body of fiction for Mudie’s readers, the catalogues offer us the “lived culture” of books in more senses than one: in demonstrating what fiction Victorians and Edwardians actually read, but also in indicating how readers made distinctions among books as they selected them from particular representations of the literary field.

In approaching these catalogues as rhetorical, we follow the Victorians’ own lead. Corresponding with the characterization of the Victorian period as one of proliferating print production and increasing literacy, the Victorian period can also be characterized as the age of the book catalogue. Librarians, booksellers, and others attempted to create order amidst a growing number of books by representing texts in carefully constructed catalogues. Nineteenth-century book cataloging was an evolution of the cataloging of the early modern period, when, as Roger Chartier describes, librarians attempted to create encyclopedic catalogues, in lieu of the impossible task of gathering large numbers of books together physically in one place.<sup>18</sup> In 1814, despite centuries of bibliographic tradition, the British librarian Thomas Hartwell Horne announced his work on the classification system for book collections as “an Introduction to the *infant* science of Bibliography.”<sup>19</sup>

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to look at catalogues, a close cousin of publishers’ lists, from a similar viewpoint, though with more attention to the nature of the metadata itself than de Glas offers. See “Authors’ oeuvres as the backbone of publishers’ lists,” 379-97.

<sup>17</sup> See Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 37.

<sup>18</sup> Chartier, *The Order of Books*. For more on the origins of cataloging in the early modern period, see also Krajewski, *Paper Machines: About Cards & Catalogs, 1548-1929*.

<sup>19</sup> Horne, *An Introduction to the Study of Bibliography*, viii.

The infant science of bibliography, or its less formal twin, cataloging, matured greatly over the next one hundred years as the epistemic infrastructure expanded.

With the 1850 Public Libraries Act, which enabled townships to finance public libraries using tax money, with new circulating libraries, and with an increased market for book sales, cataloging was elevated from the concern of select libraries to a national and societal concern. Beginning with the total revamping of the catalogue of the British Museum Reading Room, a decades-long project started in the 1830s and headed by the passionate cataloguer Antonio Panizzi, cataloging blossomed as a modern, professional endeavor with transatlantic reach.<sup>20</sup> This was the era of Melvil Dewey's decimal system, of an 1849 government commission in England to study the nation's catalogues, and of the formation of the American Library Association (ALA), the Library Association of the United Kingdom (LAUK), and the Anglo-American Cataloging Alliance, all of which attempted to codify cataloging standards for the English-speaking world.<sup>21</sup>

Catalogers in the commercial book world, in which Mudie's was situated, were also refining cataloging techniques. For example, in the 1840s the bookseller Sampson Low began periodically publishing what came to be known as the *English Catalogue of Books*, which listed basic information about books published in English over several decades, and which Low imagined to be establishing "what the English standard catalogue should be." Another bookseller, Joseph Whitaker, took on a similar project in 1874, publishing the first of many editions of the *Reference Catalogue of Current*

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<sup>20</sup> On the beginning of modern cataloging, see Svenonius, *The Intellectual Foundation of Information Organization*, 2.

<sup>21</sup> In the United States in the 1850s, Charles Jewett argued that the Smithsonian foundation publish a set of cataloging rules and make stereotypes of all the works in public libraries throughout the nation, thus ensuring their exact reliability from institution to institution (see "Smithsonian Catalogue System," Carpenter and Svenonius, 51-61). The American expatriot Henry Stevens made a similar argument in England in the 1860s, suggesting that since the ninety-one rules for cataloging Panizzi developed in his work at the British Museum had failed to fully standardize English cataloging, every book in the English language should be cataloged by a central agency and supplied with a standardized entry card, complete with an image of the book's title page, a system he called "photo-bibliography" (see *Photo-bibliography*). The most successful breakthroughs in standardizing catalogues, however, were accomplished by Americans Melvil Dewey and Charles Cutter. Dewey's Decimal System, published in 1876, and Cutter's classification scheme, which eventually became the basis of the Library of Congress system in the early twentieth century, both were based on scientific classification systems for organizing books on shelves and in catalogues, systems that were adopted abroad (Hedstrom and King, "Epistemic Infrastructure," 120-21). For more information on the ALA, the LAUK, and the transatlantic alliance between the two, see Blake, "Forging the Anglo-American Cataloging Alliance," 12-14.

*Literature* in response to “the great and not altogether unreasonable outcry that has been raised as to the want of information respecting modern books.”<sup>22</sup> The *Reference Catalogue* compiled every available publishers’ list and prefaced the compilation with a thorough index of author, title, and subject to help readers locate desired texts.

Catalogers were motivated to better organize texts for the Victorian public partly for prestige. When a government committee investigated the state of catalogues in English libraries in 1849, preparatory to the Public Libraries act, they noted not only that they saw libraries as central sites of knowledge in England—where, as Alistair Black has suggested, the working and middle classes might be both equipped with the practical knowledge they needed to contribute economically to society and exposed to improving culture, in the Arnoldian sense—but also that the catalogues of library collections are integral to libraries’, and by extension the nation’s, status.<sup>23</sup> As Margaret Hedstrom and John Leslie King note, information systems during this time were in part about “a common national and cultural identity.”<sup>24</sup> In this line of thinking, the government committee insists that “until a nation possesses a good system of Catalogues, it cannot know the extent of the literary wealth which it possesses.” The report’s wording celebrates the collective awareness of texts’ existence that is enabled through good catalogues, as much as it celebrates actual familiarity with or use of the texts themselves. The committee’s treatment of the “nation” as a subject who knows literary wealth, and its emphasis on knowing not the literature itself, but the *extent* of the literature, replaces the individual, embodied catalogue user sifting through an actual catalogue with the more abstract, idealist idea of metadata in catalogues as cultural capital.<sup>25</sup> The committee’s comments

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<sup>22</sup> Birdwood, “A Catalogue of Current Literature,” *The Times*, 20 Feb. 1874.

<sup>23</sup> See the introduction to Alistair Black’s *A New History of the English Public Library*.

<sup>24</sup> Hedstrom and King, “Epistemic Infrastructure,” 120.

<sup>25</sup> Although the standards of cataloging in the nineteenth century developed transatlantically through the cooperative efforts of American and British catalogers and librarians, the notion of catalogues as cultural markers was often reinforced by comparisons between cataloging in England and in other nations, often America. For example, in his advertisements for the commercial *Reference Catalogue of Current Literature* (1874), J. Whitaker leverages national pride to persuade publishers and readers of the usefulness of a complete catalogue of books for sale in England. He points out

further suggest that not only what texts catalogues represent, but how they represent them—in “a good system”—is an important aspect of a nation’s literary sophistication.

Catalogers were also motivated by pragmatic concerns, responding to the apparent “outcry” about the dearth of information about books for readers in the period mentioned above. As Thomas Greenwood writes in his review of public libraries at the end of the century (in what sounds like a preview of twenty-first century attitudes toward obtaining information), catalogue users should be “told at a glance” and through a “single effort” whether a collection has a desired work.<sup>26</sup> With catalogue users’ practical needs in mind, as well as a desire to both fully represent impressive text collections and utilize state-of-the-art cataloging techniques in doing so, nineteenth-century catalogers scrutinized the kind of metadata included in catalogues and how it might best be arranged.

In his correspondence about his ninety-one “Rules for the Compilation of the Catalogue,” Panizzi stresses the many difficult decisions a cataloger must make, such as whether to sort information by author or title, how to alphabetize titles that begin with articles, how to manage variant spellings, whether or not to cross-reference texts, and so on.<sup>27</sup> Panizzi exhaustively justified each of his choices partly on the grounds of professional correctness, and partly on the grounds of making catalogues more usable for library patrons.

Throughout the century, though, what was considered most appropriate and most user-friendly in a catalogue was constantly up for debate. Greenwood observed the divergences in academic cataloging in 1886, the same decade that the ALA and the LAUK began collaborating on cataloging standards, noting that “the subject of classification and cataloguing is a very vexed one

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that “in this country nothing of the kind has hitherto been attempted; but in the United States it has been found entirely successful.” On the other hand, some catalogers referenced the superior quality of English literature as a reason that English catalogues should also be superior. Speaking of both American and British literature, for instance, Henry Stevens argued that a good, standardized catalogue of all English literature would back the “boast” that English literature is the best (*Photo-bibliography*, 16-17). When the Reform Club had their catalogue printed for the first time in the 1880s, they bragged that prestigious institutions on both sides of the Atlantic requested copies (*Catalogue of the Library of the Reform Club*).

<sup>26</sup> Greenwood, *Free Public Libraries*, 179. Here, Greenwood is quoting a librarian identified as “Mr. Archer.”

<sup>27</sup> Panizzi, “Rules for the Compilation of the Catalogue,” Carpenter and Svenonius, 3-14.

among librarians.”<sup>28</sup> The American Charles Jewett, for instance, strenuously argued that book catalogues should have author-based entries without cross references, believing that if catalogue users did not know the author of a text they sought, it was essentially their fault for lacking literary knowledge.<sup>29</sup> By contrast, his rough contemporary Charles Cutter advised that library catalogers should always include the kind of entry “that will probably be first looked under by the class of people who use the library,” and to safely anticipate what that might be, he suggested, a catalogue should list each of its books multiple times, by author, by title, and by subject.<sup>30</sup> Along these lines, in the preface to the *Reference Catalogue*, Whitaker notes that the catalogue’s construction may irk “the experienced bibliophile,” but that it has been designed for those “who do not possess an intimate knowledge” of books and their usual organization.<sup>31</sup> Whitaker’s reference to the mixing of forms in the catalogue suggests, as Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin have suggested about media generally, that cataloging in the nineteenth century developed as a “dialectic” with other and previous kinds of catalogues, absorbing and altering prior conventions to suit new purposes, varying depending on whether the catalogue was a commercial or non-commercial venture, or designed for highly educated or less educated people.<sup>32</sup> As these examples imply, the choices catalogers made were motivated by their assumptions about texts, readers, and the purposes of reading: did readers know books by titles or by authors? What subjects did they most closely associate with a book? How did they associate one book with another? In turn, cataloguers’ choices were also attempts to shape readers’ perceptions of books.

Although Mudie’s catalogues are far less complex than those of institutions like the British Museum, as I will discuss, it is clear that the catalogues’ compilers, like Panizzi, Jewett, and Cutter,

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<sup>28</sup> Greenwood, *Free Public Libraries*, 178.

<sup>29</sup> Jewett, “Smithsonian Catalogue System,” 51-61.

<sup>30</sup> Cutter, “Rules for a Dictionary Catalogue,” Carpenter and Svenonius, 68.

<sup>31</sup> *The Reference Catalogue of Current Literature*, 1885.

<sup>32</sup> Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, 50.

arranged the lists with readers in mind.<sup>33</sup> In what follows, I turn to Mudie's catalogues and place their representation of fiction in relation to some of the debates about cataloging and alongside a few examples from a range of catalogues during the Victorian period. In discussing the nineteenth-century catalogues, I draw most of my examples from Mudie's 1860 and 1865 editions because they are easily accessible, being among the few of the library's catalogues that have been digitized; for similar reasons, most of my examples from the Edwardian catalogues are from the 1907 edition. However, as I have learned from brief looks at a wider range of the catalogues, although they continually underwent small adjustments—some of the specific fiction subjects shifting gradually over time, for instance, in the twentieth-century catalogues—the overall classification system in each century was longstanding, the first used by Mudie's from at least 1857 through 1901 and the later from 1902 until the 1930s. The catalogues I draw from more extensively are therefore reasonably representative case studies for Mudie's fiction classification during each era. As I have indicated, the catalogers' choices reflect Victorian fiction and its readers in ways that are both expected and surprising.

### **The prestige of fiction in Mudie's catalogues**

The framing of the fiction lists in Mudie's nineteenth-century catalogues played an important but thus-far overlooked role in balancing the library's portrayal of itself as a simultaneously literary and commercial institution, and its fiction as simultaneously selective and all-encompassing, exclusive and everyday, enduring and transient. Though fiction was widely read, its reputation was persistently tenuous in the Victorian period. Novels were suspected to be "bad" art for a host of reasons: they amused rather than instructed, they blurred fiction with reality for susceptible readers,

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<sup>33</sup> As far as I can discern, the compilers of Mudie's catalogues were often unnamed in the catalogues themselves. The compiler of the 1902 edition was named in the catalogue's preface as Henry G. Parsons. While Parsons may well have arranged Mudie's catalogue for many years, the catalogues I have seen from the surrounding years do not name a compiler or compilers. I have not found other documentation citing the catalogue compiler for the nineteenth-century catalogues or explaining the logistical process Mudie's used for putting the catalogue together.



they were erotic;<sup>34</sup> they were vilified for being, as Patrick Brantlinger puts it, commercialized for and “seductive” to the masses.<sup>35</sup> As the author of the *London Society* article asserts but works to disprove, Mudie’s circulation of Victorian fiction threatened to associate the library with the crude, commercial side of the literary world. First by minimizing the amount of fiction Mudie’s stocks in comparison to non-fiction, and then by insisting on the high quality of fiction that is found at the library, the author strives to elevate Mudie’s to “an honourable and beneficent place” in the “extraordinary conflict between good and evil literature” then raging.<sup>36</sup> Referencing a facetious “calculation of the kind of books issued” at the library—“Works of Science, 1; Works in History, etc., 3; Fiction, 3500”—the writer puts forth a more accurate calculation, one which shows novels to be subordinate to non-fiction in sum: in a million volumes, history and biography constitute two thousand, travel and adventure one hundred and fifty thousand, miscellaneous non-fiction two hundred thousand, and fiction just less than half of the total, at four hundred and fifty thousand. The author further points out that the highest circulating works on record at Mudie’s are several pieces of history and travel writing, followed by George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss*. The writer claims that the fiction the library does circulate has a “directly good” “moral tendency” and declares that “no book which public opinion would brand as a bad book is to be found here.”<sup>37</sup>

The author’s defense of Mudie’s “beneficent” moral influence in literature contrasts with his or her representation of what Mudie’s actually looks like, a “swarm” of readers flocking to the library not apparently for its virtuousness or intellectual rigor, but for entertainment and the opportunity to socialize, not least through borrowing the library’s novels.<sup>38</sup> The writer’s description of a hypothetical family’s preparation to visit Mudie’s reinforces the pull of amusing fiction: the “young

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<sup>34</sup> For an explanation of some of the fears surrounding fiction’s moral and intellectual dangers in the nineteenth century, see Brantlinger, *The Reading Lesson*, 4.

<sup>35</sup> Brantlinger, *The Reading Lesson*, 212.

<sup>36</sup> “Going to Mudie’s,” 446-47.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 447.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 445.

ladies . . . are in favour of the new novels and magazines” in the library; the dignified father “thinks it only decent to fling in favour of the awful-sounding title [to] convey the idea that all his leisure thoughts are concentrated on these vast problems[,] but in his own heart of hearts he strongly leans towards the lighter description of literature.”<sup>39</sup> Only the “severer female” in the imagined family, such as the governess or a spinster aunt, truly pretends to visit Mudie’s for its intellectual works. Like the hypothetical father who affects to visit Mudie’s for serious nonfiction but in reality goes to be one of the masses reading the common fare, the *London Society* article hovers between admiring Mudie’s aspirations to be above the common crowd by circulating nonfiction, and celebrating Mudie’s embrace of the common crowd through its circulation of the latest new novels. Much as the author’s defense of Mudie’s large nonfiction section and moral literature reinforces Mudie’s own carefully crafted self-presentation as “selective,” the writer’s simultaneous celebration of Mudie’s popularity reflects another element of Mudie’s self-characterization of its fiction, its commonness and accessibility. As Lewis Roberts suggests, if Mudie’s “rhetoric of selection” helped the library’s patrons to see themselves as part of a privileged, exclusive readership of quality, classic literature, the library also commoditized novels, thereby framing novel-reading as something of the opposite: popular, entertaining, transient, an everyday activity.<sup>40</sup>

Mudie’s was poised between stability and currentness, selectivity and popularity not only through its advertisements and its presentation of novels in the library itself (the focus of scholars like Roberts) but also in the description and arrangement of fiction in the library catalogues. The catalogues begin with an alphabetical list of “Mudie’s Select Literature,” which comprises history, theology, poetry, drama, and so on. “Works of Fiction” form a separate alphabetical list situated after the nonfiction works. In its orientation to the catalogue, the front matter relegates fiction to an afterthought. The contents page of the 1857 edition, for instance, is relatively dismissive of the

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 445-46.

<sup>40</sup> Roberts, “Trafficking in Literary Authority,” 13.

fiction collection, in contrast to the nonfiction: “the preference is given to Works of History, Biography, Religion, Philosophy, and Travel: the *best* Works of Fiction are also freely added.”<sup>41</sup> By describing nonfiction as the preferred collection, whereas fiction is just “added,” and by capitalizing on Mudie’s reputation as “selective” in its choice of fiction in noting that the library carries only the “best,” the catalogue rhetorically emphasizes fiction’s relative unimportance in relation to the rest of the stock, and de-emphasizes mass appeal as the criteria for fiction’s inclusion.

The privileging of nonfiction is carried through in the structure of the catalogue. Like our observer at Mudie’s, the catalogers foreground general literature in the collection by placing it first in the catalogue’s lists. The headers in the catalogue describe the nonfiction works with the more lofty title of “Select Works,” in comparison to the more mundane header “Works of Fiction” for novels listed at the back. Viewed from this angle, the metadata not only suggests that Mudie’s has strict criteria for what they carry, but also associates Mudie’s readers with that selectiveness: patrons are not drawn to the library for entertainment and for socializing with the masses, but to obtain the more serious and moral literature. As Bourdieu argues in *Distinction*, consumers of art are themselves classified by the classification of the art they consume.<sup>42</sup> In their strategic positioning of nonfiction in contrast to fiction, the catalogues ensure that readers can “classify” themselves as serious.

From another point of view, however, the catalogues simultaneously emphasize the prominence of popular fiction at the library, as though in a coded, subtle message to patrons. By isolating fiction in its own list apart from all other literature, the catalogues imply that fiction is the powerhouse of the institution. The distinction between fiction and all nonfiction likely reflects the actual use of the library, the fact that fiction drew patrons to subscribe and that patrons would therefore expect to be able to access the fiction collection separately, easily, and quickly. The catalogues’ language in the prefaces also suggests that fiction’s appeal is largely its newness. Every

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<sup>41</sup> *Catalogue of New and Standard Works in Circulation at Mudie’s Select Library*, 1857.

<sup>42</sup> Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, 6.

catalogue reinforces Mudie's "newness" by indicating the annual "rate of increase" in the collection, including the increase in fiction. In 1857, the annual rate of increase is eighty thousand volumes; by 1860, it is one hundred and twenty thousand. In demonstrating that the library carries what is new, and in curating a separate fiction section, the catalogue implies that the library's fiction collection is both extensive and likely attended to enough to be up to date and reflective of popular demand.

By following the structure of other circulating library catalogues in particularly distinguishing fiction in ways both positive and negative, Mudie's aligns itself with other libraries of the time. Mirroring the ambivalence that the *London Society* contributor exhibits toward fiction, many library catalogues throughout the later half of the nineteenth century were two-faced about their novel collections. Over the course of the nineteenth century, shifts in the way the catalogues organized fiction and nonfiction reinforce the common narrative of the rise of the novel as the major, but questionable, reading material of the Victorian middle classes, and as a body of literature to be carefully represented. In the first half of the century, circulating library catalogues in England and America often frame fiction as indistinguishable from other literature or as just one equal among many kinds of literature. Frequently, works of all kinds were listed together in one long alphabetical list by author or by title; other catalogues extensively subdivided works by type into separate sections or chapters, with fiction as one category.<sup>43</sup> For example, using the latter organization, the *Catalogue of Andrews' New British and Foreign Circulating Library* from England in 1828 includes "novels, romances, and tales" as one of their five sections, which group "poetry, classics, and drama," history and biography, and so on.<sup>44</sup> Although fiction is separated from other types of works, the catalogue's

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<sup>43</sup> For a few examples of early-to-mid-nineteenth-century catalogues that list all works together alphabetically, see *A Catalogue of Books in John Harding's Circulating Library*, 1804; *Catalogue of James Hammond's Circulating Library*, 1853; and *Catalogue of J. Needham's Circulating Library, Containing Novels, Tales, Romances, Etc. by the Most Popular Authors*, 1850.

<sup>44</sup> *Catalogue of Andrews' New British and Foreign Circulating Library*, 1828. For other examples of catalogues that include fiction as one among many categories of literature, see *Catalogue of James A. Acock's Subscription Circulating Library*, 1878; *A Catalogue of Hookham's Circulating Library*, 1829; *Catalogue of Books Belonging to the Mercantile Library Association of the City of New-York*, 1825; and *Catalogue of Books Belonging to the Mercantile Library Association of the City of New-York*, 1834.

structure does not draw attention to fiction as especially different—poetry, for instance, is equally framed as distinct from history and other nonfiction.

As the century progressed and the number of novels in proportion to other forms of literature grew, however, it became more common for libraries to have just two major divisions of literature, one for general literature (including drama and poetry), and the other for fiction. Presumably reflecting the solidification of the novel genre and its proliferation in the period, fiction's status changed from being one among many kinds of literature, to being literature that stands apart, "othered" from the rest. While fiction was separated and thus distinguished, in libraries concerned with maintaining a reputation as respectable, fiction was also often demoted, both through its traditional placement near the end of the catalogues and sometimes in the language the catalogues used to describe it. For example, the 1834 catalogue of the New York Mercantile Library includes a chapter for "romances" among the thirty-seven sections. By 1844, general literature and fiction form the two major divisions of the collection, fiction included after the rest of the literature and labelled a lowly "appendix."<sup>45</sup> At the same time, as in Mudie's catalogues, the fiction was made more prominent by gaining its own list, made to stand on its own as a significant reason patrons might use the library. By making the fiction collection seem secondary, even while making it more cohesive and prominent than any other literature in the collection, Mudie's catalogue enabled patrons to have it both ways, being both consumers of fiction and part of an institution that is a cut above fiction.

The catalogue's representation of the physical features of the books within the fiction list additionally situates the library and its readers in this precarious but desired position, linking Mudie's with both elite academic institutions and their detailed bibliographical catalogues and the commercial realm of publishing, with their advertisement-like book lists. Unlike many circulating library

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<sup>45</sup> *Catalogue of the Mercantile Library in New York*, 1844.

catalogues of the later nineteenth century, Mudie's Victorian catalogues describe each novel's physical format in terms of its size, the number of volumes the novel is published in, and (for a few novels in at least one catalogue) the number of copies the library holds.<sup>46</sup> In this respect, Mudie's catalogues resemble both the more formal academic catalogues and the least formal catalogues, the publishers' lists. There were likely different motivations for academic catalogers and publishers to include this information, and these differences speak to Mudie's balanced position as both a commercial venture and an institution (at least ostensibly) aspiring to something higher. Scholarly catalogers like Panizzi at the British Museum, with an interest in preserving books and representing the institution as elite, in addition to making the books available to readers, list information about physical books in the tradition of bibliography. Horne, also a librarian at the British Museum, advanced bibliography as a kind of science whose fastidiousness is partly justified in its usefulness to

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<sup>46</sup> The 1857 edition of Mudie's catalogue is the only one I have seen to indicate the number of copies of a book in stock. Since editions from the 1840s and the rest of 1850s are currently unavailable, it is unclear when this trend began and ended. The 1860 catalogue, however, does not mention stock availability, nor do any of the later catalogues I have seen. Although they adopted different structures, it was common for early nineteenth-century catalogues of all kinds—research-oriented catalogues, circulating library catalogues, and commercial publishers' lists—to include the size and number of volumes for books, including fiction. The catalogues for the Mercantile Library of New York for 1825 includes the size and number of volumes for works of fiction, and the 1834 edition includes the number of volumes. The *Catalogue of Andrews' New British and Foreign Circulating Library* (1828) actually sorts works, including fiction, by size. A *Catalogue of Hookham's Circulating Library* (1829) classifies fiction by size as well and includes the number of volumes. It should be noted that some circulating library catalogues from the early nineteenth century list only author and title for every work, for fiction and general literature. But when early nineteenth-century circulating library catalogues like the New York Mercantile, Andrews', and Hookham's do include information about size and number of volumes, they do so for all works, fiction included. For samples of the British Museum's library catalogue, see Stevens, *Catalogue of the American Books in the Library of the British Museum*, 1866. This catalogue was compiled by Stevens according to Panizzi's rules for cataloging. The trend to include metadata about books' size and shape was also followed by the Reform Club's 1883 catalogue of their collection. The formats of publishers' lists vary widely, but quite often include information about volume numbers and size, as well as other features such as the type of cover and paper, etc. Two publications that combine many publishers' lists, which offer a good perspective on the various formats of the lists, are the *Publishers' Circular* and the *Reference Catalogue of Current Literature*, both published regularly in England during the Victorian period. Beginning around 1850, many circulating library catalogues differ from academic catalogues on the one hand, and from commercial book lists on the other, in their treatment of the physical materiality of books. From around that time on, circulating library catalogues seem less likely to include information about the dimensions and volume numbers of books, especially about fiction, and particularly regarding the size of the books. The Mercantile Library of New York catalogue excludes size information for novels, but not for general literature, in the 1844, 1850, 1866, and 1872 catalogues. The *Catalogue of J. Needham's Circulating Library, Containing Novels, Tales, Romances, Etc. by the Most Popular Authors* (1850), the *Catalogue of James Hammond's Circulating Library* (1853) and the *Catalogue of James A. Acock's Subscription Circulating Library* (1878) list the number of volumes for fiction but not the size for any works, fiction or nonfiction. The *Catalogue of the New York Free Circulating Library, Ottendorfer Branch, German and English Books* (1884) also does not include the size or the number of volumes for most literature.

readers, but partly in the love of books themselves and in the pride of the bibliographer.<sup>47</sup> By contrast to these more lofty goals, publishers' lists, which often include this same information, presumably include size and volume numbers for works as part of their advertisement, as a way of indicating to readers what they were paying for. The financial value of books hinted at in the British Museum's more bibliographic descriptions of books—which underlies their cultural value by association with the rare books of bibliography, even though the library's books are not on the market and are not necessarily rare—is more directly commercial in the publishers' descriptions, signifying to readers the kind of object they can expect to own from their purchase.

In the context of broader circulating library cataloging norms, Mudie's choice throughout the nineteenth century to include volume and size information for all literature and especially for fiction sets Mudie's apart from many of its peer institutions. Of course, Mudie's reasons for offering this information were likely at one level merely practical. Since subscribers could borrow individual volumes of a work one at a time, and since borrowing one volume of a multi-volume work cost as much as borrowing a whole work in one volume, they needed to know how many volumes a work included in order to plan when to request each volume. The indication of the number of copies available may also have helped readers to make decisions about when to order which books. And offering information about the books' sizes, the more surprising detail of the catalogue, may have been a courtesy, giving readers a small preview of what they were likely to get when they ordered a work.

As I have suggested with regard to the descriptions of books in the period's academic and commercial catalogues, however, these pieces of information have additional valences beyond mere logistics. At another level, they situate Mudie's fiction as both commercial and elite. As N.N. Feltes argues, the nineteenth century saw the commodification of the novel at the capitalist scale. This

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<sup>47</sup> Horne, *An Introduction to the Study of Bibliography*, 288.

development involved the wedding of the novel to the three-volume form, which readers came to expect and which in turn generated greater demand for texts as products.<sup>48</sup> In this rendering, readers depended on these familiar, mass-produced and mass-consumed forms to know that the fiction they were borrowing was widely recognized as a legitimate literary product, in the correct size and shape for novels. Readers also relied on what Griest calls the “comforting bulk” of the novel, in part since, A.W. Pollard points out, the perceived financial worth of a book was related to the amount of shelf space it took up.<sup>49</sup> According to Feltes’s formulation, it could be said that Mudie’s nineteenth-century catalogues include the information about physical books and stock that they do because by noting that the library carries the standard three-volume, post-octavo form, and that these books are in demand, subscribers can be assured that they are getting what they pay for, in terms of middle-class commodity capital. In being reminded through the catalogue of the modern, three-volume, post octavo form of the books they borrowed, Mudie’s patrons were invited to participate in the ritualistic, communal act of reading the latest fiction alongside their peers.

Yet surprisingly—given the current, standard association of both Victorian fiction generally and Mudie’s library with the three-volume novel format—Mudie’s catalogue contains a larger percentage of one- or two-volume novels than of three-volume works, as well as a larger number of novels in octavo or small octavo than in post-octavo form. The catalogue reminds us just how many canonical novels were originally printed in one volume, such as Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Mary Barton* (1848). It also demonstrates how often novels that were originally published in three volumes, like Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), were reprinted in single volumes, and not in post octavo form, and experienced by many or even most Victorian readers in these forms (see fig. 1). Though Mudie’s financial success may have been tied to the library’s ability to purchase and stock the latest three-

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<sup>48</sup> Feltes, *Modes of Production of Victorian Novels*, 24. Royal Gettman explains that in this system, “a novel was to consist of so many pages, so many lines per page, so many words per line, always in three volumes post octavo.” Qtd. in Feltes, 26.

<sup>49</sup> Griest and Pollard, qtd. in Feltes, *Modes of Production of Victorian Novels*, 26.



volume novels, and therefore to circulate a single novel to three subscribers at the same time, the commercialized three-volume novel represented only a minority portion of Mudie's stock, and generally only for brand-new fiction. The recognizable, comforting, post-octavo three-volume form was clearly *the* form of the Victorian novel only in quite specific contexts, only for some novels, and often only for the first year or so a novel was on the market, before a cheaper reprint could be made.

The notion that the physical descriptors of books in Mudie's catalogues are there to mark their worth as mass-produced middle-class book objects therefore offers only a partial explanation of the symbolic work that the catalogue entries do in highlighting books' physical forms. If in describing novels' size and volume number, Mudie's catalogues create consumer desire through representing mass-produced products, another possible effect of that bibliographic metadata is to associate Mudie's with literary institutions untainted by direct commercial gain from readers. Manifesting the care that academic or gentlemanly catalogers take in recording novels' formats, the catalogues could also be read as intimating that novels' worth inheres partly through their having been described in the same manner as a rare, expensive book selectively treasured by a bibliographer, or as a respectable book preserved in the nation's greatest library, whether in one volume or three, post-octavo or duodecimo.<sup>50</sup> At once reflecting these differently motivated traditions—the increasingly modern and commercialized, and the increasingly conservative, formal, and academic—the catalogues promote the library's fiction as desired by both the masses and the elite.

The catalogues' situating of fiction in relation to nonfiction and their representation of novels' materiality demonstrate not only how the catalogues are tools for patrons' use in finding

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<sup>50</sup> As Lewis Roberts has argued, at Mudie's the Victorian novel was also commodified through the negotiations that got novels admitted into the collection, through which novels were evaluated not on literary worth but on the likelihood of their circulation, and through the evidence of supply and demand offered by the presence of books in the Great Hall at the library itself ("Trafficking in Literary Authority," 3-6). Roberts further points out that because books could be "borrowed," and because Mudie's framed itself as "selective," the vulgar, commodity status of its novels could be somewhat obscured from patrons (7-8). Mudie's catalogues' links to both commercial publishers' lists and staid bibliography further supports Mudie's balance between commodification and selectiveness that Roberts outlines, while bringing the history of cataloging to bear on Mudie's strategies.

books, but also the rhetorical work they do in reflecting and mediating perceptions of the library. While my analysis so far highlights new means through which Mudie's represented itself to the public, the nature of that representation—the balance between elitism and commercialism in the nineteenth century—is not itself new to scholars. The next section, however, demonstrates at least one way in which the nineteenth century catalogues' construction suggests an alternative narrative of how novels were viewed in the Victorian period.

### **Centrality of novel titles and fiction authors**

In how they guide readers to access novels through author names and through titles, Mudie's nineteenth-century catalogues imply that for Victorian fiction readers, author names may have had less prominence than is usually supposed. In most scholarly accounts, Victorian author names are generally favored over book titles as the most recognizable and influential element of texts for readers. "Literary works" in our day, as Michel Foucault has noted, "are totally dominated by the sovereignty of the author."<sup>51</sup> Foucault argues that the idea of an author functions in various ways to help readers interpret literary works. According to him, readers use the author's name to explain why texts are written the way that they are, to find points of unity among many works by the same writer, to explain why a writer's work changes over time, and to sort out potential contradictions in an oeuvre. For Foucault, in all of this labor that their mere presence accomplishes, authors' names do not just serve as proper nouns that identify who wrote a text, but bring whole discourses into being, giving texts meaning and a "means of classification" to establish relationships among them.<sup>52</sup>

The scholarly narrative about authorship in nineteenth-century England corroborates Foucault's sense that authors and their names are central in modern Western book culture. Gérard Genette points out in his *Paratexts* that the idea of including authors' names on texts is relatively

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<sup>51</sup> Foucault, "What Is an Author?", 126.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 123.

modern.<sup>53</sup> His observation is in keeping with Foucault's assertion that whereas before about the eighteenth century, literary works were accepted by virtue of their "real or imagined" ancientness in the absence of the author's name, by the modern period readers began to require knowledge of the author in order to interpret and evaluate literature.<sup>54</sup> Eighteenth-century developments in the literary market shifted writing from a patron-supported activity to a profession, and by the latter part of the nineteenth-century, developments such as stricter copyright rules, the rise of author societies and literary agencies, the firmer establishment of royalty-based publishing, and the declining taste for anonymity had elevated authorship into a sophisticated profession with complex market rules and sets of credentials for legitimate authorship.<sup>55</sup> Along with these structural changes to the nature of authorship, the relationship between an author's name and the meaning and value of his or her work strengthened. For example, as Andrew Piper suggests, in the early nineteenth century, collections of authors' works were rhetorically centered on the author's life. Frontispieces featuring portraits of the author reflected the contemporary "idea of literature as an index of personality" and suggested that "in reading the collected edition, one experienced a persistent encounter with a person," the author.<sup>56</sup> Reflecting on the notion of the author's personality specifically in the context of liberalism later in the century, Elaine Hadley analyzes the *Fortnightly Review* editors' radical decision to attach authors' signatures to articles, a break with traditional periodical etiquette and a sign of the growing importance of what Hadley calls authors' "embodied" identity in relation to the ideas they put forth, in balance with the less personal "disinterestedness" also valued in liberalism.<sup>57</sup> These studies and others reinforce Foucault's argument that authorship is a prominent facet of modern literary culture,

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<sup>53</sup> Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, 38.

<sup>54</sup> Foucault, "What Is an Author?", 125-26.

<sup>55</sup> See Graham Law, "The Professionalization of Authorship," Kucich and Taylor, 37-55.

<sup>56</sup> Piper, *Dreaming in Books: The Making of the Bibliographic Imagination in the Romantic Age*, 59.

<sup>57</sup> Hadley, "A Frame of Mind: Signature Liberalism at the *Fortnightly Review*."

and that signifiers of the author (whether names or images) communicated something to readers about what they might expect from a text, or how they might interpret it.

Offering a different angle on the matter, Mudie's catalogues are a means through which we might compare readers' awareness of authorship to their familiarity with other elements of books. Genette has drawn attention to "paratext"—the apparatus of a text, such as its title, cover, spine, author, epigraph, and so on—as the "threshold" of books.<sup>58</sup> According to Genette, this threshold invites readers into a text or turns them away, shaping their interpretations of what they read. Whereas scholars like Hadley focus on particular pieces of paratext as an interpretive threshold, catalogues and cataloging discourse frame the paratextual pieces of a text as always in competition with one another, vying for readers' recognition. With regard to authorship, catalogers constantly ask, When is the author's name a more defining piece of information than other elements of a book, such as the title or subject, and vice versa? Giving insight into the paratextual elements readers were thought to mentally associate with books, the ordering of metadata in catalogues offers another way to verify or complicate Foucault's "author function" and to examine how the different elements in Bourdieu's "field of production"—here, authors and titles—might support or obscure each other.<sup>59</sup>

Mudie's representation of authors and titles takes significance through comparison to broader trends in cataloging. As a rule, formal, academic nineteenth-century catalogues accord preference to the author as the most important piece of information about a text. Panizzi's rules suggest that works should be listed alphabetically by author whenever an author is known, with other facets of books, such as their titles, serving as cross-referenced entries. The British Museum reading room catalogue and many other academic and higher-class catalogues follow suit.<sup>60</sup> This standard implies catalogers' belief in the importance of, as Piper puts it, "literature as an index of

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<sup>58</sup> Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, 1-2.

<sup>59</sup> See Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 42.

<sup>60</sup> For example, the 1894 catalogue of the literary works in the collection of the Reform Club, an association of liberal politicians, was initially designed on the advice of Panizzi and organizes every work alphabetically by author last name.

personality” and a product of one creative mind, as well as their belief that catalogue users shared that perspective.

In the decades surrounding and long after the publication of Panizzi’s rules, however, catalogers challenged whether authors’ names should be the dominant form of access to texts. At the conservative end of the spectrum, advocates of author-centric catalogues like Jewett insisted that “in the vast majority of cases, whoever wishes to refer to books in a library, knows the names of their author.”<sup>61</sup> In his 1876 “Rules for a Dictionary Catalogue,” however, Cutter refutes the idea that users of catalogues possess a solid knowledge of author names. He describes a shift in audience from earlier to modern book catalogues, suggesting that where older catalogues were meant for scholars, in the later nineteenth century catalogue usage has widened enough that they should be easy enough for children to use.<sup>62</sup> Another commentator on catalogue users observed that scholars and the general public approached literature differently: whereas scholars “knew the author for which they wanted to look,” “the public reader generally required a book that would interest him, and about which he had not fully made up his mind.”<sup>63</sup>

Even before Cutter’s 1876 directive, circulating libraries and other literary institutions that were disseminating literature to the general public—to a different “class of people,” in Cutter’s words, than the British Museum’s scholarly patrons—were expansive in their vision of readers’ knowledge of books and their desires as selectors of books. These catalogues privilege authors as main headings only insofar as they are likely to be the piece of metadata by which readers will know a book. Many nineteenth-century circulating library catalogues bypass author-centric lists altogether and list every work by title, or often, list works of nonfiction by author and works of fiction by title

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<sup>61</sup> Jewett, “Smithsonian Catalogue System,” 59.

<sup>62</sup> Cutter, “Rules for a Dictionary Catalogue,” 66.

<sup>63</sup> Greenwood, *Free Public Libraries*, 182.

(a telling distinction that I will return to later in this chapter).<sup>64</sup> Many use a mixture of author- and title-access points for all works. This effort to make literature more available is well expressed in the preface to the 1850 edition of the New York Mercantile Library's catalogue: "it is hoped . . . that [the catalogue] will be found such a key to the library as will enable its most inexperienced member to unlock its treasures."<sup>65</sup> In 1872, this catalogue began including every book by author and title, and works of nonfiction additionally by subject, "to satisfy a need, which is increasingly felt by our subscribers, and by our staff; for, in the great majority of cases, it is the title of a book which the applicant remembers, or else it is a subject about which he wants some book, without knowing what book."<sup>66</sup> Whitaker's *Reference Catalogue* justifies its hundreds of pages of indexing similarly: "The endeavor has been made to construct the Index so that the slightest clue to the title, the author, or the subject will suffice to lead to the discovery of the book required."<sup>67</sup> Thus, while some nineteenth-century catalogues support Foucault's and others' analyses of authorship as the main "classifier" readers use to make sense of literature, many catalogues designed for a general readership suggest that Victorian readers do and should be able to find texts through multiple forms of identification.<sup>68</sup>

Mudie's catalogues from at least the 1850s through 1901 take this more liberal view of readers, democratically listing all works in the general literature and fiction sections by both author and title in one alphabetical list. A reader looking for Frances Trollope's *Michael Armstrong* (1840) could find it listed twice in Mudie's catalogue, under "Michael Armstrong" (with Trollope's name listed after) and under "Trollope, Mrs."; a reader interested in Dickens could find all of his works under "Dickens, Charles," and also under their individual titles, with Dickens's name attached

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<sup>64</sup> For examples of catalogues that list works by title, see *A Catalogue of Books in John Harding's Circulating Library, in the Market-place* (1804); *Catalogue of Andrews' New British and Foreign Circulating Library* (1828); *Catalogue of J. Needham's Circulating Library* (1850); and the *Catalogue of James Hammond's Circulating Library* (1853).

<sup>65</sup> *Catalogue of the Mercantile Library in New York*, 1850.

<sup>66</sup> *Second Supplement to the Catalogue of Books in the Mercantile Library of the City of New York*, 1872.

<sup>67</sup> Advertisement to *The Reference Catalogue of Current Literature*, 1885.

<sup>68</sup> Svenonius, *The Intellectual Foundation of Information Organization*, 15-16.

second in the entry. Revealing traces of the Victorian public's perception of novel paratexts that is otherwise difficult to detect, the catalogues indicate that for all the centrality of authorship and the decline of anonymity during the period, Mudie's readers were not necessarily conditioned to see works primarily in terms of authorship, and were equally as likely to know *Oliver Twist* as "Dickens." In literally demoting the author to secondary status in many entries and making titles equally important overall, the catalogue entries allow individual works to stand more independent of an author's oeuvre. Depending on where they go in the catalogue or what part of the catalogue they stumble onto, readers might, as Foucault suggests, be encouraged to view the novel in a web of "Dickens" discourse, in relation to *The Pickwick Papers* (1837), *A Christmas Carol* (1843), *Dombey and Son* (1846-48), *Bleak House* (1853), and any other of the more than dozen novels listed under "Dickens" (see fig. 2). However, they may also see *Oliver Twist* (1838) as an entity relatively free from comparison to his other works and the imposing shadow of his by-then famous name (see fig. 3). If Foucault is correct in his argument that the classifying force of an author's name is crucial to readers' interpretation of a work, then the de-emphasis of Dickens in a reader's encounter with *Oliver Twist* may significantly influence what readers get out of the book. The loosening of authors' symbolic hold on their works within the catalogues also broadens possible interpretations of the novels.

Further, insofar as Mudie's catalogues privilege authorship over titles, they do so in a way that changes the terms of what makes authorship important. Although there are no obvious distinctions between the types of entries in typeface, size, or spacing to suggest that one is privileged over the other, when an author has more than one work included in the collection, the works are listed under the authors' name with a dash in place of the name itself, to indicate that the name at the head of the category applies to all of the works (in the same way that modern bibliographies substitute a dash for author names for additional works by the same author in a list). Therefore,

authors with multiple works are incidentally visually accentuated in the catalogue, being followed by many dashes that are eye-catching in the context of the whole list. As a result, readers' attention is drawn more to authorship as the interpretive framework for texts when an author has published many works, or at least when he or she has many works circulating at Mudie's (as is illustrated by Dickens's author entry, which takes up nearly half a page of the catalogue). The catalogues give the impression that while author names are not generally a more important access point to individual works than titles, authorship as an overall interpretive framework in Foucault's sense becomes more possible and relevant the more books an author writes.

The fact that Mudie's presents authorship as something "earned" by numbers, when author names and titles are otherwise equal elements of paratext, pushes against some of the existing scholarly descriptions of how authorship came to be a dominant category in the Victorian period. At least in Mudie's catalogues, the emphasis on authorship does not emerge as an "index of personality"—the kind of aura indicated in Piper's and Hadley's analyses of author images and signatures on works—but as evidence of the mere accumulation of works, the author's sum contribution to the mass of print then circulating. Works that are now considered canonical for literary merit, such as those of George Eliot in the 1860s catalogues, are spatially dwarfed by now-forgotten writers, simply because at the time she had written less than they. Nor do earlier fiction authors like Walter Scott take up more space than later Victorian, prolific authors like Margaret Oliphant or Captain Marryat, for example. Rather, authorship is more visible with popularity, the most favored authors gaining admission into Mudie's stock in a given moment. Tempering the perceived importance of authorship overall as a governing category for interpreting fiction, the catalogues also nuance our understanding of *how* authorship might have come to be portrayed as central when it was featured predominantly.

### **A new catalogue for a new century**



At the turn of the century, Mudie's dramatically changed the framing and organization of the catalogues' fiction lists. Although the catalogue continued to include fiction as a separate section placed after the non-fiction list, it ceased to give any indication at all of the physical dimensions of novels in the collection, perhaps in part reflecting the move away from multi-volume works and in part reflecting the waning suspicion of novels. As John Kucich and Jenny Bourne Taylor assert, the end of the nineteenth century marked the disunification of a previously relatively united body of writers and readers, the Victorian middle class, with changing social structures and new subgenres and experimental forms of fiction.<sup>69</sup> Reminiscent of the nineteenth-century catalogues that seek to de-emphasize fiction, the preface of the 1901 catalogue still points out that "Fiction, though not, as is sometimes supposed, the major division of the Library, will be found to be practically a complete collection of the best Novels and Stories."<sup>70</sup> But the preface to the 1907 catalogue reverses the earlier emphasis given to various genres in the catalogue, explaining that the first two sections of the catalogue contain "all books other than Fiction."<sup>71</sup> Here, though the nonfiction texts are listed first sequentially, nonfiction is the "other" category. Fiction is also foregrounded in the 1931 catalogue, even while, as in the nineteenth century, the catalogue author(s) are eager to point out what else the collection offers. "Provision is made not only for the Novel reader," they tout, "but also for those interested in ART, BIOGRAPHY, DRAMA, HISTORY, MUSIC, and TRAVEL."<sup>72</sup> Rather than seeking to hide its fiction, the catalogue seems to rely on and overtly play up Mudie's reputation as a major circulator of fiction, asserting first that "the Novel reader," inevitably, is drawn to Mudie's catalogue to find reading.

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<sup>69</sup> For more on the notion of a unified Victorian novel readership, see the introduction to Kucich and Taylor, *The Oxford History of the Novel in English*, xxi.

<sup>70</sup> *Catalogue of the Principal English Books in Circulation at Mudie's Select Library*, 1901.

<sup>71</sup> *Catalogue of the Principal English Books in Circulation at Mudie's Select Library*, 1907.

<sup>72</sup> *Mudie's Catalogue of the Principal English Books in Circulation at the Library*, 1931.

The advertised criteria for Mudie's fiction collection changes as the library comes to embrace its status as a fiction library more fully. Over time, the rhetoric of the catalogue transitions from "selective" to complete and representative. The front matter of the 1857 catalogue insists that the library holds "the *best* Works of Fiction." The 1907 catalogue, though it still refers to Mudie's "select" library and speaks of holding "the best in English literature," makes two additional claims about the literature it holds: the collection is "more complete" than any other in the British Isles, and in reference specifically to fiction, the library holds not the "best," but the most "popular" novels. Here, fiction's popularity is not implied, as it is in the nineteenth-century catalogues, but flaunted. As in the early twentieth-century catalogues, the 1931 catalogue claims to carry "the popular novelists of the past and present era," which "are fully represented." By 1931, all reference to Mudie's "selectness" has gone, and the catalogue advertises Mudie's as "the house that supplies the world with books," "old established—yet progressive," and aware of "the requirements of the new reading public."

The more striking change in the Edwardian period, however, was in how the catalogues represented fiction by author and title. Whereas in the nineteenth century works of fiction were organized in one long, alphabetical list with both authors and titles as access points, beginning in 1902, the catalogue included three separate lists to categorize fiction: one by title, one by author, and one by subject (see fig. 4). In the absence of the catalogers' records (to our knowledge, Mudie's business documents were destroyed when the library closed in the 1930s) it is difficult to know exactly what prompted the change.<sup>73</sup> But one can speculate that it had something to do with Mudie's perception that it needed to reach the "new reading public" that the 1931 catalogue mentions, to offer multiple access points to texts for the modern reader as well as to show the catalogues off as sources of guidance to readers, as the flowery language of the prefaces indicates.

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<sup>73</sup> I'm grateful to Troy Bassett for informing me that Mudie's business records likely did not survive the close of the business.

As Bolter and Grusin note, while new media forms usually strive to offer more immediate experiences to users—in this case more accessible and helpful representations of texts—as self-conscious innovations on older forms, they also tend to draw attention to their mediation, encouraging viewers to “take pleasure in the act of mediation.”<sup>74</sup> When Mudie’s first created a classified catalogue of nonfiction in 1901, the library also began drawing attention to the catalogues’ mediation of readers’ selection processes by including a preface to describe the catalogue, which they had not done in the nineteenth century. In it, the directors “beg to invite special attention to an important modification in the *form* of the Annual Catalogue” (emphasis mine). The preface lauds not just the catalogue’s improved navigability, but also what the catalogue’s modified form now “indicates” about the library: the new organization “will serve to indicate, in a manner full and evident at a glance, how wide and extensive are the resources of the Library; comprising large collections in all branches of literature.”<sup>75</sup> It seems that for the compilers, readers’ “glancing” at the catalogue, rather than using it to find a text, serves its own purposes—to show how much is in the library, but implicitly also to appreciate how the system that the catalogers have created highlights the collection’s topical diversity, which can be seen through a swift glance of the eye that doesn’t even take in the actual texts listed in the catalogue.

In addition to indicating a new era in information, these later catalogues, viewing Victorian literature in (slight) retrospect, offer more original perspectives on how readers thought of and spoke of novels, as well as how the library encouraged patrons to view fiction, in terms of temporality, genre, and the relationship between authors and titles. In the nineteenth century, the catalogues’ framing of the library’s fiction collection—as prominent but subdued, as elite but popular, traditional yet new, accessible by authors but also by other means—associated the library simultaneously with the established, academic literary scene and with the commercial literary scene.

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<sup>74</sup> Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, 14.

<sup>75</sup> *Catalogue of the Principal English Books in Circulation at Mudie’s Select Library*, 1901.

Mudie's Edwardian catalogues, I argue, more overtly embrace a lay readership and the priorities of a business-oriented institution, giving further insight into some of the distinctions between critical and commercial ways of categorizing literature.

In Victorian criticism, anthologies of Victorian literature, and guides to the Victorian novel, no one classification of Victorian fiction looks exactly like another. But neither do these various classifications vary too much. Despite quibbling differences, for example, most commentaries agree that the Victorian age of literature extends from about the 1830s through the 1890s.<sup>76</sup> The end of Queen Victoria's reign is a convenient bookmark for the Victorian age, both because the period has been named for her and because the years surrounding her death seem to be characterized by major changes in literary taste. By this time, according to the *Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel*, readers and writers seem to have lost much of their enthusiasm for the features generally ascribed to Victorian fiction—for example, “sentimentalism, unambiguous narrative voice, and straightforward narrative structure,” as well as the “sincere commitment to fiction as a morally transforming force”—and now favored narrative elusiveness, psychological complexity, and detachment.<sup>77</sup> In a similar fashion, the same genre categories for Victorian fiction show up again and again. Both *A Companion to the Victorian Novel* and *The Oxford History of the Novel in English* contain essays on the Newgate novel, the historical novel, the sensation novel, the Bildungsroman, and Gothic fiction. In his *Graphs, Maps, Trees*, Franco Moretti includes these and many other common categories in a graph

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<sup>76</sup> Many anthologies and critical companions explicitly bookend the Victorian period with those decades, sometimes citing the beginning and end of Queen Victoria's reign as the reason for the choice. For example, the Victorian volume of the *Norton Anthology* pins the beginning of the period to the year 1837, when Queen Victoria ascended the throne, and its end to 1901, when she died (980). *A Companion to Victorian Literature & Culture* “claims as ‘Victorian’ roughly the period 1830-1900” (xii). Although they may not date the period so directly, other critical works that survey Victorian literature imply similar boundaries through the texts they feature. The Victorian volume of the *Longman Anthology* begins with Thomas Carlyle in the 1840s and includes works all the way up through those by Rudyard Kipling at the end of the century. In a discussion of Victorian novels, *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel* likewise mentions late-century novels such as Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) and describes the end of the Victorian era as coincident with Joseph Conrad's work in the late 1890s and early 1900s (1-11). See Greenblatt, Christ, and Robson, *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: The Victorian Age*; Tucker, *A Companion to Victorian Literature & Culture*; and Damrosch, Dettmar, Henderson, and Sharpe, *The Longman Anthology of British Literature: The Victorian Age*.

<sup>77</sup> Tucker, *A Companion to Victorian Literature & Culture*, 7.

of the rise and fall of novel genres, which are drawn from over one hundred studies by other scholars.<sup>78</sup> Even if critical discussions about the exact boundaries of the Victorian era and the most precise way to characterize its novel genres may be ongoing, contemporary scholarly classifications of Victorian literature, and of Victorian fiction in particular, remain relatively stable.

These classifications endure for good reason. The “Victorian” is not a superficial category, for although numerous critical sources concur in their dating of the Victorian period from the 1830s to about 1900, a text’s publication date alone is not what makes it truly Victorian. As Herbert Tucker explains in discussing how certain authors and texts were chosen to represent “High Victorian” literature in a collection of criticism, works from this period “ring still with . . . textual-contextual synergy,” imprinted with qualities that make them representative of a particular historical period, when texts with similar thematic or formal features circulated at the same time and place.<sup>79</sup> And so, rather than using “strictly calendrical grounds” to choose material, the contributors to the volume naturally gravitated toward “centripetal sources,” common “texts, authors, and movements”; the collection for the most part excludes writers who technically fit at the margins of the stated time range but whose writings are out of sync with the Victorian-ness the volume seeks to illuminate. Like the typical periodization of Victorian literature, the usual Victorian fiction genre categories reflect something about how texts within a group “work”: genre labels identify how a certain novel’s various elements come together to make it recognizable as one among many of its kind. In Moretti’s graph of genres, each genre has characteristics recognizable to multiple scholars, and each has a coherent role in the history of fiction, a beginning and a trajectory with a recognizable readership, some even named by the Victorians themselves, as with sensation fiction. Whereas ““novelistic (sub)genres”” might individually be viewed as “accidents,” “interesting,” but “local in character,

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<sup>78</sup> Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History*, 19.

<sup>79</sup> Tucker, *A Companion to Victorian Literature & Culture*, xii.

without real theoretical consequences,” Moretti writes, when they are analyzed together, these novel genres tell a coherent story about “the novel.”<sup>80</sup>

By contrast, Mudie’s Edwardian catalogues appear to rely on “calendrical” details and “interesting accidents” as their *basis* for categorizing and defining Victorian fiction, rather than solely using literary-historical and formal patterns. The following sections consider the different patterns of categories for Victorian literature that emerge from this logic, and their relevance for differentiating among readerships within the Edwardian period and within our own.

### **Relativizing literary periods**

Analyzing the impulse to delimit one literary period from another, Ted Underwood has argued that exercises in periodization are often motivated by a desire to clarify one’s own age. Through “vividly particularizing and differentiating vanished eras, contrasting them implicitly against the present as well as against each other,” Underwood reasons, readers and literary critics feel better able to “define cultural moments,” including their own.<sup>81</sup> Emphasizing distinction as significant in itself, Underwood’s rendering of the impulse of periodization resonates with Bourdieu’s theory that works and agents in the literary field attain meaning and status through contrast with other works and agents, by taking one position “in relation to the *space of possibles*” within a field.<sup>82</sup> In beginning to categorize fiction into periods at the turn of the century, Mudie’s catalogues certainly seem invested in defining “cultural moments,” and yet, their specific temporal categories belie that purpose. A typical college-level survey course of later British literature might juxtapose the Romantic against the Victorian against the modern, creating a narrative that highlights the ways one period differs from and reacts to its predecessors, a course modeled, as Underwood shows, after nineteenth-century

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<sup>80</sup> Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees*, 29-30.

<sup>81</sup> Underwood, *Why Literary Periods Mattered: Historical Contrast and the Prestige of English Studies*, 2-3.

<sup>82</sup> Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 30.

British university literary courses that first began to do this type of periodization.<sup>83</sup> Mudie's catalogue instead creates its narrative of literary history through a much simpler separation of "past" literature (which is coded "Victorian") from the literature of the "present." The catalogue's blunt divisions raise questions about the degree to which eras must be "vividly particulariz[ed] and differentiat[ed]" in order for their dissimilarity to be established, or at least presumed to exist, and about the extent to which critical and commercial modes of literary periodization share priorities. The catalogue's varying use of fiction's authors and titles to suggest periodization additionally indicates how Edwardian readers might draw on different paratextual elements to access novels from the past versus the present.

The creation of separate author- and title-based lists in the 1902 catalogue enabled Mudie's to draw attention to its old stock as well as its new, paralleling its efforts in its advertising to carve a new niche for itself in the wake of the three-volume novel's demise at the turn of the century. Mudie's demarcation of literary periods is somewhat indirect, the structure of the first two fiction lists making period distinctions in a peculiar way. The 1902 catalogue makes a distinction in its lists between "standard" and "recent" fiction. The preface to the 1907 edition clarifies how fiction from each group is listed differently, and also replaces its reference to "standard" fiction (a commonly used term for older literature) with a reference to "Victorian" novelists: "the Catalogue contains works of Fiction, placed first under their titles, followed by an alphabetical list of Authors with the novels they have written; in this section the names and works of the popular novelists of the Victorian and present era are fully represented" (see fig. 4). To rephrase: whereas the author list, in which novels are arranged alphabetically by author last name, includes novels from at least two named eras—"the Victorian and present"—the title list does not, containing only present-era works. By comparing the lists and noting which texts are included in both lists and which are included in

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<sup>83</sup> Underwood, *Why Literary Periods Mattered*, 81-82.

the author list but not in the title list, I have deduced which works the catalogue's compilers considered to be "Victorian" (or in earlier catalogues, "standard") and which "present era" (see figures 5 and 6). Given that the catalogues distinguish "present" fiction from Victorian or standard fiction but do not distinguish Victorian fiction from earlier fiction—a striking choice I will return to shortly—the catalogues give more insight into how Victorians and Edwardians specifically marked the end of the Victorian or standard period than into how they marked its beginning.

The language the catalogue uses to define the "Victorian," and the library's choice of boundary for the period, put definite and apparently intentional distance between the current time, the first decade of the twentieth century, and the end of the Victorian period. Mudie's lists first distinguish "standard" from "recent" literature in the January 1902 catalogue, the first full edition of the catalogue prepared after Queen Victoria's death, almost as though the cataloguers are uncannily aware that theirs is the exact year future generations of anthologizers will point to, for convenience if for no other reason, as the end of a literary era. But though by 1907 Mudie's officially uses the term "Victorian" to describe earlier fiction, the catalogers situate the end of the Victorian period not at the turn of the century, but further back in the nineteenth century, well before Queen Victoria's death.

A close examination of the 1907 lists' contents shows that the catalogue frames the "present era" as implicitly beginning sometime in the 1880s, about twenty to thirty years past at the time the catalogue was compiled. Novels published before the early 1880s—including the works of mid-century writers like Charlotte Brontë, William Makepeace Thackeray, Charles Dickens, and George Eliot, and even later writers like William Harrison Ainsworth, whose last novel, *Stanley Brereton*, was published in 1881—are with very few exceptions excluded from the title list, represented as squarely



Victorian.<sup>84</sup> By contrast, novels from the mid- to late-1880s and onward are likely to be considered “present.” Whereas George Gissing’s *Unclassed* (1884), for instance, is listed only in the author list, and thus indirectly labeled Victorian, his 1887 *Thyrza* and every one of his subsequently published works but one make the title list with other “present” works.<sup>85</sup> From this view, some of Gissing is not “late Victorian,” as Gissing is frequently designated in anthologies and course syllabi, but of a different period altogether, highlighting the Edwardians’ self-perception of being more removed from the Victorian period than they are often framed today.

On the one hand, the catalogues’ designation of the 1880s as the period boundary between the Victorian and the contemporary seems plausibly to be the same *kind* of periodization Underwood writes of—periodization that views a body of literature as bound together not only by dates, but also by history, by the events, preoccupations, stylistic and thematic tendencies that give texts of a time their “textual-contextual synergy,” in Tucker’s terms. Although Mudie’s defines the end of the Victorian period a decade or two earlier than the most predominant boundary used today, the catalogue is still in good company in its delineation, among both older and more recent commentators who do see the 1880s, not 1900, as a legitimate turning point of literary history. As I have indicated, *The Oxford History of the Novel* offers a few reasons that the 1880s might mark the end of the Victorian period: this is about the time of the separation of fiction into “light” versus “serious” fiction, the rise of the one-volume novel in place of the three-volume novel, the accompanying proliferation of subgenres, and the dis-unification of a previously unified body of writers and

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<sup>84</sup> A small number of works from the beginning or middle of each of these author’s prolific careers are included in the title list. These works are Thackeray’s *Catherine* (1839-40), *Vanity Fair* (1848), and *The Newcomes* (1855); Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* (1839) and *Dombey and Son* (1848); and Eliot’s *Felix Holt* (1866). The aberrations perhaps reflect a certain novel’s continued popularity, but because of the apparent randomness of some of the selections that are not the most well-known of an author’s fiction (*Catherine* and *Felix Holt*, for example), I am inclined to think it just as likely that the deviations reflect the compiler’s personal heightened awareness of a certain novel or even a proofreading error.

<sup>85</sup> The exception is *Sleeping Fires* (1895), which the catalogue lists under Gissing’s author entry but not with its own title entry.

readers.<sup>86</sup> And Gissing's 1898 *Charles Dickens, A Critical Study* confirms that already in the 1890s it was possible to think of Dickens and his contemporaries as part of a different literary period, not only in distance of years but in its distinct qualities. "The time which shaped [Dickens] and sent him forth is so far behind us," Gissing writes, "as to have become a matter of historical study for the present generation," a time "made remote by a social revolution of which [Dickens] watched the mere beginning."<sup>87</sup> The catalogue's reference to the Victorian and to the present as "eras" support such an interpretation of literary history, suggesting that the library is attentive to the specific features that define one "cultural moment" against another.

Considering other factors, though, Mudie's 1880s boundary appears rather to obscure than to illuminate the particularities of historical periods, substituting instead a more basic division between new and modern novels and those from an extensive but vaguely delineated literary past. The fact that the "Victorian" is the only specific word the catalogue uses for an era, in company with the more generalized "standard," "recent," and present," and the fact that the 1907 catalogue polices the boundary between the Victorian and the present but has nothing to say about the cutoff between the Victorian and earlier periods, suggests that the Victorian is a stand-in for past-ness in general. The catalogues' conflation of Victorian literature with Victorian readerships supports this notion, implying that books written in the Victorian period and books read in the Victorian period—both of which could be referenced by the phrase "the popular novelists of the Victorian era"—are not meaningfully different. The catalogue includes as Victorian not only the Brontës, Dickens, and Eliot, but also non-British authors like Louisa May Alcott and authors who died long before Queen Victoria ascended the throne, such as Jane Austen (1775-1817), Henry Fielding (1701-1754), and Samuel Richardson (1689-1761). The way the catalogue lists works of some authors whose works span both sides of the 1880s boundary further reinforces Mudie's investment in

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<sup>86</sup> Kucich and Taylor, *The Oxford History of the Novel in English*, xvi-xix.

<sup>87</sup> Gissing, *Charles Dickens, A Critical Study*, 7, 13.

distinguishing recently published literature from everything else. Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895), for example, are included as present-era fiction, whereas his *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), *The Return of the Native* (1878), and *The Trumpet-Major* (1880) are implicitly framed as Victorian. Even more strikingly, the works of novelists whose fiction is highly formulaic, even over time, such as those of William Clark Russell and Anna Katharine Green, are also often split cleanly across the two periods, apparently by no logic save their publication dates.<sup>88</sup>

These choices indicate what Mudie's believed would be most appealing and instinctive about literary periods to readers. Rather than situating Edwardian readers as part of one historical era in a long line of others, with many past and many more to come, Mudie's catalogue strategically highlights the modern-ness of its contemporary novels, as more different from *all* old fiction than old works of fiction are from each other. At the same time, the catalogue's broad-strokes rendering of the "Victorian" stock strengthens the prestige and nostalgic appeal of the older literature, framing the "popularity" of works from the past as an enduring popularity, emphasizing the timelessness of works that do not need to be grounded in their historical specificity to be comprehensible or relevant to readers. Employing the form of more critical, finely tuned modes of periodization without becoming bogged down in the details, Mudie's expression of literary history as a binary defined simply by dates evidently speaks to the dual impulses of readers to feel both distinctly modern and able to relate to older literature outside the parameters of historical particularity.

Mudie's temporal categorizations of fiction are suggestive of broader trends in commercial book institutions. It is beyond the scope of this chapter and the evidence the catalogues afford to

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<sup>88</sup> Mudie's 1931 catalogue appears to maintain the 1880s boundary between older and contemporary literature, although unlike the Edwardian catalogues, it no longer uses the term "Victorian" to describe past literature. The catalogues' consistent use of the 1880s as a period boundary over time could suggest that Mudie's indeed saw pre- and post-1880s fiction as distinct in particulars rather than merely through the passage of time. But it is also possible, and I think likely, that the boundary never moves after the initial restructuring for logistical reasons. By the 1930s the catalogue exceeded a thousand pages, and moving entries out of the title list and into the author list over time would require much more work than just adding entries for each year's new fiction to the title list.

say definitively that Mudie's periodization is representative of Edwardian commercial book institutions generally. However, it is telling that the circulating library's restructuring of the catalogue in the early twentieth century loosely coincides with the emerging divide between high literary culture and mass culture.<sup>89</sup> Given that Mudie's was a business appealing to the masses (and, by the early twentieth century, less concerned with the gatekeeping role the library assigned to itself and touted in the nineteenth century), the library's binary between past and present literature reflects a popular, lay-reader interpretation of literary history, perhaps as distinct from a critical tradition of more precise periodization that Underwood suggests had been developing in Victorian-era universities.

Bookstores and readers' forums in our own time demonstrate the enduring weight of periodization like Mudie's for lay readers and consumers, as an alternative to that one might learn in a college course. For example, on *Goodreads*, an online forum for readers' reviews that allows users to categorize books with tags, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Frankenstein* (1818), and *The Age of Innocence* (1920) are all tagged as "Victorian." Readers who visit a brick and mortar retail bookstore may find—next to the shelves filled with general and largely recent fiction and those advertising the latest bestselling novels—*Nicholas Nickleby* (1838) specially displayed alongside *The Iliad*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), *Moby Dick* (1851), and *To the Lighthouse* (1927) under a sign colloquially labeled "Classics." Taking on a similar sense to Mudie's standard or "popular Victorian" category, the term "classics" denotes a liberal interpretation of the literary past, evoking the timelessness of the works it describes while simultaneously setting them apart from the current time, since "classic" works are singled out from more recent literature that as yet has only the potential to become classic. As is evident by these temporal arrangements familiar to everyday readers now,

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<sup>89</sup> Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, and Postmodernism*, viii.

Mudie's catalogues participate in, and perhaps helped to shape, a tradition of positioning readers as at once in their moment and in all time.

Further, because the catalogue structurally distinguishes between authors and titles in the service of marking larger, stark temporal differences between newer and older fiction, the library also mediates how the relationship between a novel's title and its author's name changes over time. The Edwardian catalogues suggest differences between the paratextual lives and the paratextual afterlives of texts: unlike in the nineteenth-century catalogues, a distinction is drawn between older works that can be accessed only through their author names (or in some cases, as I will discuss, through subject headings) and recent work that can be found by either title or author. A twentieth-century reader therefore has to know, for example, that George Eliot wrote *Romola* (1863) in order to find the novel in the catalogue. The catalogues implicitly argue that titles are the main form of paratextual access to fiction in the public consciousness only for recent titles; individual titles from a past era have lost resonance when separated from their author's names. As individual titles lose their weight in the catalogue as an interpretive threshold over time, older authors begin to transcend any one of their individual works to become the central feature of all of their publications—"Eliot" is a more important facet of *Romola* than "Romola." Victorian authorship may be the sovereign piece of paratext to literary scholars now, but from the perspective of the catalogues, that interpretive angle comes to general readerships only with the passage of time.

The catalogue's inclusion of a fiction title list additionally frames fiction, or at least current fiction, as informative itself. Whereas in Mudie's nineteenth-century catalogues, both general literature and fiction were listed by redundant, mixed author- and title-entries, the twentieth century witnesses a split in the paratextual framing of fiction and nonfiction. The Edwardian catalogues change by making a separate title list for fiction, but they also change by dropping titles as a paratextual threshold for nonfiction. Nonfiction works from 1901 onward are instead described

through a mixture of author entries and subject entries. In doing so, Mudie's later catalogues join, belatedly, many other circulating library catalogues in distinguishing the role of titles in fiction from their role in nonfiction. In at least several nineteenth-century circulating library catalogues, it is only works of fiction (sometimes called "tales" or "romances") that are most consistently listed by the title, and perhaps the author, where other works are most consistently listed by author, and perhaps by a mix of title and author.<sup>90</sup>

From one perspective, the trend suggests that in popular if not in academic literary spheres, the "rise of the author" in the nineteenth century develops unevenly, with authors of nonfiction gaining overt, recognized ownership of their written works generally earlier and more emphatically than authors of fiction, who are more often sidelined by fiction titles. The more consistent author-entries for nonfiction in this sense may be a result of different ideas regarding creativity and intellectual property for nonfiction versus fiction. From another angle, the general pattern and Mudie's eventual adoption of it in the Edwardian catalogues implies a uniquely close connection between works of fiction and descriptive titles, a relationship that is less emphasized for nonfiction. This close relationship between fiction and titles seems surprising, given that titles are generally much more indicative of subjects than are author names, and as I will discuss, nonfiction gets associated earlier and more often with subjects than does fiction. But speculatively, I would suggest that one reason titles are so closely attached to novels is that titles in fact can serve as a kind of substitute for or alternative to subject headings, doing for fiction what subject headings had long done for nonfiction, as fiction was only beginning to be described through subjects. Thus, by seeing novels listed by titles, a patron might understand that *Wives and Daughters* (1864-66) is at one level about wives and daughters, in the same way that *The Life of George Cruikshank*, a nonfiction work listed in the 1907 catalogue, is presumably about the life of George Cruikshank.

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<sup>90</sup> See *A Catalogue of Hookham's Circulating Library* (1829); the *Catalogue of Books Belonging to the Mercantile Library Association of the City of New-York* (1834); and the *Catalogue of James A. Acock's Subscription Circulating Library* (1878).

## Literalizing subject categories

Mudie's third list for fiction, which sorts novels by subjects, more dramatically highlights the differences between current critics' view of fiction categories and that of a broader readership in the Edwardian period and today. In criticism, novel genres are typically defined through criteria that might be called holistic, having to do with what, in sum, a text is or what it does. Fredric Jameson, for example, argues that there are two traditional versions of genre criticism, which relate to one another dialectically. One is the "semantic," which attends to "the essence or meaning of a given genre," its "spirit," "world view," "sensitivity," or "vision."<sup>91</sup> The other is the "syntactic," which "analyzes[s] the mechanisms and structure of a genre . . . to determine its laws and limits."

Standard characterizations of fiction genres, including Victorian fiction genres, tend to offer a sense of the fiction's semantics or syntax or both. The tradition of Gothic fiction, for example, is widely thought to have begun with the publication of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764 and continued through the twentieth century. Though the genre is "highly unstable," as Jerrold E. Hogle writes, it has commonly agreed-upon characteristics, "a Gothic tale usually tak[ing] place . . . in an antiquated or seemingly antiquated space [where] are hidden some secrets from the past . . . that haunt the characters, psychologically [or] physically."<sup>92</sup> Victorian Gothic fiction is seen as having its own particular bent, in deliberately emphasizing the mystery of daily life and the unknowable boundary between life and death, as a challenge to the realism that characterized the literary age.<sup>93</sup> The related genre of sensation fiction is similarly categorized through its origins, plot features, and intended effects on readers. Sensation fiction arose as a genre in Britain in the 1860s, and, as Pamela Gilbert puts it, was "distinctly transgressive in that it was thought to appeal directly to the 'nerves,' eliciting a physical sensation with its surprises, plot twists, and startling revelations" and in that it

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<sup>91</sup> Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, 106-08.

<sup>92</sup> Hogle, "Introduction: The Gothic in Western Culture," 2.

<sup>93</sup> Lutz, "Gothic Fictions in the Nineteenth Century," 78.

was “popular” for “a range of readerships,” being both commercially and culturally successful.<sup>94</sup>

Historical novels, too, are described through familiar patterns: historical novels are set in the past, often mix fictional with historical characters, and, Richard Maxwell explains, “are structured around a chronology of widely remembered events: wars, dynastic changes, political controversies, or great natural disasters.”<sup>95</sup> In these frameworks, Victorian novels do not generally announce which genres they belong to. Rather, genres and forms have to be articulated somewhat retrospectively by literary scholars studying the Victorian period. They may also have been defined in retrospect by their own authors in prefaces, as Walter Scott does for the historical novel in his preface to *Waverley* (1814), or by nineteenth-century novel critics—Anthony Trollope famously described the Victorian fiction as typically divided into two main camps, the “sensational” and the “anti-sensational,” or “realistic.”<sup>96</sup>

Fiction genres cohere partly through their readerships, who, in Jameson’s words, “specify the proper use of a particular cultural artifact,” marking genres with an origin point and periods of popularity.<sup>97</sup> Thus, the Gothic is partly defined through the popularity of Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*, and historical fiction is thought to have become a genre in Scotland during Walter Scott’s heyday. However, in creating genres out of novels’ holistic features, critics capture only one way that readers categorize fiction; the typical subject categories of modern commercial book institutions, public institutions serving a broad readership, and readers’ communities tell a different story. Consider the common classification guidelines presently used by American publishers and booksellers, called BISAC (Book Industry Standards and Communication). Users of BISAC are instructed to determine the subject headings for books simply by “look[ing] for the term that most closely fits the content of the book,” which may be generic but which just as often may be a topic,

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<sup>94</sup> Gilbert, Introduction to *A Companion to Sensation Fiction*.

<sup>95</sup> Maxwell, “The Historical Novel,” 59.

<sup>96</sup> Anthony Trollope, *Autobiography*. Sensation fiction was first described as such by critics in the 1860s who were responding to the novels written in the wake of Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White*, the “first” sensation novel. See Mangham, Introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Sensation Fiction*, 1.

<sup>97</sup> Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 106.



plot element, or setting.<sup>98</sup> The resulting subject headings appear, compared with Moretti's neat graph, to be a bewildering jumble. For instance, the headings categorize fiction into novels about "holidays" and "family life"; mystery and detective fiction is further divided into such categories as "women sleuths" and "police procedural"; science fiction includes "alien contact" novels and "genetic engineering" novels.<sup>99</sup> Apparently following these standards, the Barnes and Noble website allows users to view fiction under categories like "infancy and childhood," "diplomats," "deserts," and "Halloween."<sup>100</sup> When, as on *Goodreads*, readers take it upon themselves to label fiction by subject, they frequently use a BISAC-like logic.<sup>101</sup> *Silas Marner* (1861), *Jane Eyre*, and *David Copperfield* (1850) are presented as comparable texts because they are all in a category called "Books with a Surname or Family Name in the Title." At times readers even incorporate their personal experience of reading a book into this single-faceted mode of classification: for example, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), *Wuthering Heights* (1847), and *Middlemarch* (1871-72) are all part of a category of books that readers "Gave Up On."

As a forerunner of the BISAC codes and one of the pioneers of subject-based (as opposed to genre-based) fiction classifications, Mudie's catalogue brings a certain lucidity to this seemingly eclectic classification system. Mudie's choice to begin ascribing subject labels to nonfiction in 1901 reflected broader trends in book cataloging. Despite the convention of alphabetical cataloging, many older bibliographies and catalogues had classified texts in some way, often by what we might now call disciplinary divisions, and by the mid-nineteenth century, many readers and catalogers were anxious for "dictionary catalogues" (as opposed to alphabetical catalogues), pre-runners of the digital, keyword-searchable catalogues we have now.<sup>102</sup> The mainstream effort in England to yoke

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<sup>98</sup> "Tutorial and FAQ," *BISG: Book Industry Study Group*, 7 Dec. 2015.

<sup>99</sup> "Complete BISAC Subject Headings, 2015 Edition," *BISG: Book Industry Study Group*, 1 Dec. 2015.

<sup>100</sup> *Barnes and Noble*, 31 Oct. 2014.

<sup>101</sup> *Goodreads*, 26 June 2014.

<sup>102</sup> Svenonius, *The Intellectual Foundation of Information Organization*, 43-46. As Greenwood summarizes one late-nineteenth century commentator on the debate between alphabetical and dictionary (or classified) catalogues, "the day had gone by

books to subjects can be traced as far back as Thomas Hartwell Horne's first attempts to make a subject index for the British Museum Library in the first half of the century, and G.K. Fortescue's more successful attempts to make a subject index in the 1880s (Panizzi had been resistant to subject categories in catalogues, in part because he believed it was impossible to accurately, consistently identify books' central subjects).<sup>103</sup> In the "information culture" of the nineteenth century, it is not surprising that popular catalogues like the *Reference Catalogue* also begin using classified organizations and indexes to frame their book collections as informative sources, rather than only as the products of particular authors or publishers.

But when Mudie's adopted a similar system at the turn of the century, the library was relatively unique in applying subject divisions to *fiction*. A reviewer of Mudie's 1903 catalogue highlights the innovativeness of the classification, asserting that "the Topical Index to Fiction possess[es] considerable value for librarians engaged in the work of annotation," the "fiction classification" being "a lesson to many municipal librarians, who at present steer clear of annotation of every kind."<sup>104</sup> Mudie's method was paralleled in as important an institution as the Library of Congress in the United States, which began attaching subject labels—at the time not distinguished from genre labels—to fiction as part of its revamped cataloging system, begun in 1898.<sup>105</sup>

As well as being part of the turn-of-the-century investment in developing catalogues that more accurately and exhaustively describe collections, the application of subject classifications to fiction reflects novel readerships in the early 1900s. Categories, as Foucault notes in the preface to *The Order of Things*, make it possible for us "to name, speak, and think" of the categorized matter in

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when libraries were regarded as accumulations of books merely for the learned few, who, indeed, probably needed no guide to their own specialties. Now libraries were rightly looked upon as repositories of instruction for the inquiring masses, and no adjunct could better promote and aid in meeting their wants than a dictionary catalogue" (*Free Public Libraries*, 179).

<sup>103</sup> Hill, "Fortescue: The British Museum and the British Library Subject Index," 58-63.

<sup>104</sup> "Library Publications," *The Library World*, 1903.

<sup>105</sup> "Library of Congress Subject Headings," *Library of Congress*, 11 Feb. 2014.

certain ways, and also obscure other ways that we could possibly see the material.<sup>106</sup> The relatively unfamiliar system of fiction categorization in Mudie's Edwardian catalogues not only puts many novels into new relationships to each other, it requires us to reconsider the nature(s) of fiction altogether. The change suggests that institutions serving a broad audience, including commercial institutions like Mudie's, assumed readers would be most attracted to, and best assisted by, fiction categories that emphasize not only generic features but more basic, single, concrete elements of novels' content, those perhaps more immediately relatable or even useful to them. The preface to Mudie's 1902 catalogue explicitly clarifies that the redesign is meant to help patrons find novels appropriate for their "interests"—"Historical, Topographical, and Social"—in the same manner as they might search for a non-fiction text. The catalogue's system of classification, and its particular categories, provide useful insight into the nature of subject-based fiction categories and give a glimpse into the subjects that Mudie's thought would most "interest" Edwardian readers.

Like the BISAC categories, while some of Mudie's groupings would be familiar to literary scholars today, others are surprising. In this catalogue, the "Mysterious and Marvellous" constitutes a literary category; so do "Woman, Shop Life and Service," "Hospital and Medical, Experiments," "Sport," and "Cuba" (see fig. 7). Geographical categories, which predominate, are themselves subdivided into a wide-ranging bunch of categories—a different set of subdivisions for each place—and are situated beside other major categories that speak to aspects of fiction entirely unrelated to geography, such as "Humour" or the "Religious and Clerical." Even when categories seem to more closely resemble current, holistic scholarly categories, merely with different names, the subcategories often return to concrete, single features of novels. For instance, the catalogue's categories of the "Mysterious and Marvellous" and "Occultism" may overlap with what is widely considered the Gothic, fantasy, or science fiction, suggesting that the novels will explore humans' relationship with

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<sup>106</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xxi.

the unknown and take some sort of stance on the meaning of that relationship. But in the subcategories—for “Occultism,” “Dreams and Visions,” “Dual Personality and Transmigration,” “Reincarnation,” and so forth—the subjects sound more like a psychology textbook heading, where one may not just ponder the mystery of daily life in an age of realism, but also learn about the features of dual personality by reading *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886). Similarly, a genre that begins as “Detection of Crime” fiction, a category that might suggest, in present scholarly terms, a certain generic plot line, or perhaps a type of novel that uses that plot line to explore ways of identifying truths, quickly also becomes a grouping of novels about “Murder and Burglary,” “Impersonation,” “Jewels, Bank Robbery,” and “Poisoners,” similar to BISAC’s subdivisions of the same genre. Wilkie Collins’s *The Moonstone* (1868), for example, which we tend to think of today as significant as perhaps the first detective novel, is in this catalogue reduced to one among many novels about jewel robbery (see fig. 8). The labels “Poisoners” and “Swindlers and Forgers” indicates that poisoners and swindlers, easily identifiable features, are distinguishing characteristics of novels in these categories, but it is difficult to ascertain how novels under the category “Poisoners” are semantically or structurally different from novels under the category “Swindlers and Forgers.”<sup>107</sup>

As the catalogue identifies very specific aspects of interest in the texts, it draws out what is often overlooked in criticism of the novels even while it disregards much of what is, in a semantic or syntactical analysis of genre, usually considered central in them. This is especially true because each novel is categorized under only one category, regardless of how many it might logically fit. Attention to the place in which novels are set is one striking theme in the catalogue’s classification. The catalogue’s bias toward geographical categories is overwhelming (represented in fig. 7). Of the

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<sup>107</sup> In some respects, in its attention to concrete features of novels, the catalogue might be said to perform a version of what Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, over a century later, have labeled “surface reading”: looking “at” novels rather than “through” them, focusing on features that are especially “evident, perceptible, apprehensible” (“Surface Reading: An Introduction,” 9). This is not to say, however, that conventional genre categories are always deep or symptomatic readings of texts. Rather, I draw the connection simply because many of the subject categories the catalogue includes do direct readers’ attention to very evident elements of the text that many critical genres may de-emphasize or overlook in their efforts to express what is not articulated in novels in so many words.

eighty-nine major headings, sixty-three are places, framing English-language fiction as a geographical encyclopedia of the world. Although the focus on locations might be predictable in the first years of the twentieth century, with England's empire at its height, the catalogue gives the impression that popular fiction in English is even more dramatically internationally oriented: the fiction appears to be as much about the Arctic, Finland, or Iceland as about more prominent locations in the British Empire. The catalogue's organization downplays England's place in the array of nations about which a reader might wish to know, even as it subtly Anglicizes the entire world by showing how English-language novels offer information about a multitude of places far beyond England.

Even if the catalogue's emphasis on place can be read as a display of the scope and reach of English-language literature, in other ways the catalogue pushes against the notion of a national literature from which certain genres might emerge. The setting of the novel, not the nationality of its author, most often determines the place name under which it is catalogued. So, for example, Arthur Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) is listed under the broad heading of "America, North, Utah," reflecting the fact that part of the novel takes place in Utah (see fig. 9). The catalogue further resists the notion of a national literature through its incredible specificity in arranging fiction by places *within* these nations, destabilizing what is "English" or "American" by including much more local categories: fiction from or about Illinois and "Missouri, North," as well as Nottingham, Shropshire, the Isle of Man. Yet, in breaking down national literatures into tiny regional literatures, the catalogues do not necessarily frame novels as "regionalist" texts, as literary scholarship now defines them. Regionalist texts are associated with a preoccupation with place, having structural and ideological commitments to a detailed representation of a defined space. The minute geographical divisions of novels in Mudie's catalogues suggest that there is no such thing as a specifically "regionalist" text because there is no such thing as a "non-regionalist text." Since all fiction has a setting, the logic seems to go, all novels are simply by nature reflective of regions.

This classification offers to Mudie's readers, many of whom may be unfamiliar with the literary landscape of authors and their works represented in the author and title lists, another way of accessing fiction. The exhaustive mapping of places taps into subscribers' apparent desire to read about exotic places and, especially in its extensive lists of novels in various regions of England, into their enjoyment in reading about places already familiar. For critics today, Mudie's geographical categories also foreground the potential importance of place in individual novels that are not usually analyzed primarily or only in terms of their setting. Though scholars today might look for *A Study in Scarlet* under the category "Detection of Crime" novels, its listing under "Utah," next to a novel entitled *Mormon Prophet*, shifts the focus from *A Study in Scarlet*'s use of mystery conventions to what the novel says about Utah and the Mormons. Even in the case of novels whose categorizations still make intuitive sense now, such as the grouping of *Wuthering Heights* (1847), *Jane Eyre* (1847), and *Sylvia's Lovers* (1863) under "Yorkshire, Local and Rural," the single focus on the setting of the novels frames Yorkshire as a more important feature of each novel than other possibilities, such as their gothic or historical approach to their subjects, or their depictions of "child life," "marriage," or "madness," all of which are also categories in the catalogue (see fig. 10). Susan Warner's American bestseller *The Wide, Wide World* (1850), which is partly set in New England but which otherwise has little recognized thematic or stylistic affiliation with regionalist works from New England like Sarah Orne Jewett's, finds its way into Mudie's catalogue as being about "New England States, General," not tagged as a sentimental, religious, or domestic novel, or as a Bildungsroman. The catalogue prompts readers first to see "New England States" fiction as a cohesive category; second (ironically, given the novel's title) to see Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* as a specifically New England novel rather than more broadly an American novel; and finally to mine the narrative for what it reveals about New England, instead of about a young girl's experiences as she comes to know the "world."

Much like the catalogue's place categories, Mudie's historical labels for fiction similarly accentuate novels' content alongside, or even more than, the context of their production. In contrast to the author and title lists, the subject list classifies fiction by time period in detail, including, for British literature, categories for the reign of each monarch. Mudie's typically represents historical periods as subcategories of places: under category of "England," for instance, there is a subheading for "Historical," with its own subheadings that indicate chronological historical periods in England: "Charles I, 1625," "Civil War, 1642-48," "Commonwealth," "Charles II, 1660," and so on. Whereas critical theories of the historical novel attend to how historical fiction reconstructs the past for present-day readers, examining in part how the time during which a novel is written influences how the novelist portrays the time during which a novel is set, the lists of novels under Mudie's historical periods collapse the distinction between novels *set* in past times and novels written *in* past times. For example, under "George III, 1760," "Social and Political Life," Charles Dickens's *Barnaby Rudge*, a novel written in the 1840s and set in the early 1780s, rubs shoulders with Frances Burney's *Evelina*, which was written in the late 1770s and set in its own era (see fig. 11). The end of the list also includes a suggestion to "see also" the novels of Jane Austen and William Makepeace Thackeray, Austen having written during George III's time and Thackeray having written about it.

The catalogue presumably appeals to readers curious to know about or simply attracted to certain historical times, rather than to readers interested in literary history. What seems like an odd juxtaposition in scholarly schemas of Victorian fiction, the mixing of eighteenth-century, Romantic-era, and Victorian fiction as alike, is presented as obvious in Mudie's catalogue because of the similar historical settings of each novel. As a group, the novels sketch the 1770s and 1780s as a particular era of history, about which fiction can offer insight, rather than manifesting identifiable eras of *novels*, whose forms or depictions of history were shaped by the time of writing.

The divisions imply to Mudie's subscribers that novels of all forms and eras can offer a fairly transparent window into history, as they can into places. In addition to drawing out new ways to consider place and time in novels, the catalogues' subject classification of fiction, like the predominance of titles in the revised catalogue structure, encourages a reconsideration of the informativeness of fiction. The preface to the 1902 catalogue boasts that through the new classification of nonfiction, patrons "consulting the Catalogue [can] ascertain with ease and rapidity the number and kind of books in circulation at the Library upon any Topic that may be required." The preface then suggests that the classification of fiction is linked "by a simple arrangement of Cross References," such that a patron reading a work of nonfiction to learn about a particular topic can "augment" that knowledge by reading about it in "the lighter vein of Fiction." Although the specific subject classifications for non-fiction and fiction in the catalogue do not exactly align in practice, the preface's framing of this connection between the two recasts the nature of fiction as connected to nonfiction.

The catalogue's linkage of fiction with topics of nonfiction might be interpreted in at least one of two ways, depending on what the catalogers mean by referring to fiction's "lighter vein" of representation. On the one hand, it may imply that fiction offers a perspective on a topic that is not truthful per se, "light" signifying fictional and therefore not factual, but that shows readers how one writer or character might interpret the facts, which is in itself information on a topic, albeit indirect. On the other hand, the linkage may imply that fiction, like nonfiction, offers factual information about topics, if only in a more amusing way. While the former interpretation is more in keeping with how we might typically view the subject matter of fiction—as a "topic" that is commented upon through narrative perspective, tone, character representations, and so forth—the latter interpretation suggests an approach to fiction that de-emphasizes an author or narrator's angle, style, tone, bias, and so forth, and instead encourages readers to use fiction to gain access to the things that are



perceived by the authors as they really are. Both interpretations, however, emphasize the informativeness of fiction rather than its entertainment value. Framing novels for readers not just as general information containers but also as very specific, factual information sources, the catalogue's divisions extend what Richard Menke has asserted about the Victorian novel "imagining itself as a medium and information system in an age of new media."<sup>108</sup> Valuing fiction for its informativeness may actually seem more Victorian than modern, considering that the turn to information occurred during the nineteenth century, as Menke asserts, and given modernist writers' well-known focus on form and their disdain for straightforward treatments of topics. But the cataloging systems of the early twentieth century, like Mudie's and the Library of Congress, suggest that at least in terms of how fiction might be accessed, its informative value was still, or perhaps even more, paramount at the time than it had been in the nineteenth century.

As my examples suggest, the basic temporal divisions of literary periods and the largely subject-, setting-, and information-oriented approach to fiction in Mudie's catalogue renders categories that are paradoxically both self-evident and opaque. The classification system gives fascinating hints into Edwardian views of novels, but it stops short of being a comprehensive or fully theorized account of fiction categories. Mudie's date-based division of literary eras is straightforward, but not evidently indicative of specific, perceived characteristics differentiating each of the periods. The relationship between each subject heading and each novel under them is crystal clear; the reason each novel ends up in the category it does, and not in any other category, however, is less obvious. And the reason that some entire categories are included and not others seems in some instances baffling—why is "Norway" a major category, but not "Governesses"? In part, the catalogue's limitations in classifying literature likely result from the constraints of a printed catalogue, constructed by humans at a particular time. The catalogue's designated cutoff date for "recent"

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<sup>108</sup> Menke, *Telegraphic Realism: Victorian Fiction and Other Information Systems*, 3.

fiction obviously stems from the point of view of readers in the early twentieth century; there is space for only so many subject-based access points for novels that each contain a nearly infinite number of features that readers might find interesting. Although they may emphasize some topics or settings more than others, novels do not readily lend themselves to finely tuned subject-based hierarchies—is *Wuthering Heights* most importantly “about” Yorkshire, or ghosts, or revenge? In this sense, lacking a more holistic approach to eras and genres, fiction classifications by commercial institutions like Mudie’s inevitably offer only an incomplete view of literature and of readers.

In at least one way, however, the catalogue’s period binaries and somewhat uneven collection of subjects reveal more than they obscure about Edwardian readers’ attitudes toward and uses of novels, and by extension about the readers of our own time, for whom similar classification systems have been designed. Mudie’s might have classified fiction at least somewhat more systematically by limiting the criteria for categories themselves—by including only place categories or only categories of time, for example. The library’s choice not to do so, though, preserves the sense of how various and shifting fiction categories might actually be, when considered first from the perspective of readers from a specific time period in their actual selection of novels. Research on cataloging fiction bears this out: one study of library catalogue users found that patrons typically search for concrete terms, usually time and place, or through subjects if they have a “precise and unarguable definition,” such as “‘aeroplanes,’ ‘childhood,’ ‘governesses,’” as opposed to “terms which allow varying interpretations,” like the word “romantic.”<sup>109</sup> Because of the “multidimensional character of users’ needs,” the researchers suggest, fiction should be cataloged for a broad readership by subject matter, setting, mode, format, and difficulty level.<sup>110</sup> Unlike a card catalogue, or an online catalogue now, Mudie’s catalogue could not easily or cheaply offer patrons access to each

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<sup>109</sup> Mark Pejtersen and Austin, “Fiction Retrieval: Experimental Design and Evaluation of a Search System Based on Users’ Value Criteria (Part 1),” 242.

<sup>110</sup> Mark Pejtersen and Austin, “Fiction Retrieval,” 233.

of the library's novels through such multi-faceted categorization. Even so, Mudie's does follow the same *spirit* of cataloging fiction, including categories with different ontological bases, ranging from subject and setting to tone.

In doing so, Mudie's catalogue offers something like a snapshot of how a single reader or certain group of readers (here, the Edwardians) may categorize fiction, a representation that is fixed in print form and only partial, but that nevertheless gestures toward the infinitely variable combinations through which novels may be read, compared, and interpreted over time and across space. Mudie's by no means replaces or takes precedence over more well-established, academic temporal and generic classifications of Victorian fiction. But all together Mudie's categories theorize how flexibly fiction can be read categorically, when classifiers are motivated, as in a commercial endeavor like Mudie's, to find ways to connect readers with novels of "interest."

## **Conclusion**

The catalogues' use of metadata to place fiction in relation to nonfiction, to represent the physicality of books, to represent books' authors and titles, to divide literary periods, and to denote the essential subject matter of novels is suggestive of how middle-class Victorians and Edwardians perceived these different elements of novels, and of how emerging information theory may subtly have affected their perceptions. In their appeal to middle-class readers with a close but fraught relationship to fiction in both the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the catalogers tell a nuanced story about novels, in sometimes overlapping and sometimes contradictory ways. They thus offer a prismatic entry into the field for their readers and for scholars today. For example, through their prefaces' descriptions of fiction and through dropping the size and volume numbers for novels between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the catalogues show fiction being increasingly, openly respected, overt arguments about novels' prestige no longer seeming so necessary. However, by playing up the informational value of fiction through subject divisions at the turn of the century,

rather than emphasizing the moral and aesthetic qualities of fiction that are highlighted in the nineteenth century, the catalogues suggest that the grounds on which fiction might be respected have shifted, surprisingly, partly to fiction's coverage of topics of interest. In turn, against the ahistorical framing of fiction in the subject lists, by including author lists governed partly by time period alongside the subject lists in the later catalogues, the catalogues still encourage readers to consider fiction as meaningful because of its deeper context beyond subject matter, its origins from a particular mind or in one particular time period as opposed to another. Through all of these configurations and others I have discussed, the organization of fiction in Mudie's catalogues gives a fuller, revisionary picture of the diverse, "lived culture" of Victorian fiction, in its own time and in its afterlife in the early twentieth century.

This chapter has looked closely at Mudie's catalogues as an example of one channel through which readers in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries were guided to encounter, learn about, and select books. As the vigorous debates about cataloging during the period attest, there was great interest in organizing—and thereby controlling—the ways readers approached books, and the interpretations they made of them through metadata. But for all they can tell us about readers' expectations of and likely interactions with books, catalogues offer a greatly refracted view of living readers and their information-gathering about books. As other sources from the period demonstrate, the efficient, orderly engagement with texts that the catalogues attempt to facilitate was partly countered by the transient, self-directed, and/or random means through which readers actually engaged with metadata, sometimes in catalogues and sometimes in other settings. In the next two chapters, I will turn to some of these sources to analyze the tension between the controlled framing of books offered by metadata like catalogues, and the less systematic meaning-making made possible when readers found books through less organized—and sometimes almost erratic—means.

## Chapter 2

“What’s that book that everybody’s talking about just now?”:  
Cultural Gatekeeping and Information in Victorian Bookselling

A vignette from F. Anstey’s “Lyre and Lancet,” published serially in *Punch* in 1894, comically illustrates the frustrations of selecting reading material at a railway bookstall. The scene relays a conversation between the haughty Lady Cantire, accompanied by her daughter Lady Maisie, and an unassuming bookstall clerk.<sup>1</sup> Approaching the clerk in search of reading material for her imminent journey, Lady Cantire demands “a book of some sort—no rubbish, mind; something serious and improving, and *not* a work of fiction”:

*Clerk.* Exactly so, Ma’am. Let me see. Ah, here’s *Alone with the ’Airy Ainoo*. How would you like *that*?

*Lady Cant.* (*with decision*). I should not like it at all.

*Clerk.* I quite understand. Well, I can give you *Three ’Undred Ways of Dressing the Cold Mutton*—useful little book for a family, redoooced to one and ninepence.

*Lady Cant.* Thank you. I think I will wait until I am reduced to one and ninepence.

*Clerk.* Precisely. What do you say to *Seven ’Undred Side-splitters for Sixpence*? ’Ighly yumorous, I assure you.

*Lady Cant.* Are these times to split our sides, with so many serious social problems pressing for solution? You are presumably not without intelligence; do you never reflect upon the responsibility you incur in assisting to circulate trivial and frivolous trash of this sort?

*Clerk (dubiously).* Well, I can’t say as I do, particular, Ma’am. I’m paid to sell the books—I don’t *select* ’em.

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<sup>1</sup> Anstey, “Lyre and Lancet: A Story in Scenes,” *Punch, or the London Charivari*, 1894. The scenes, of which the train station scene with Lady Cantire is just one, were compiled and published separately in one volume the following year.

*Lady Cant.* That is *no* excuse for you—you ought to exercise some discrimination on your own account, instead of pressing people to buy what can do them no possible good. You can give me a *Society Snippets*.

*Lady Maisie.* Mamma! A penny paper that says such rude things about the Royal Family!

*Lady Cant.* It's always instructive to know what these creatures are saying about one, my dear, and it's astonishing how they manage to find out the things they do.

The scene pokes fun at several familiar facets of Victorian reading, including the banality and trashiness of literature for purchase at train stations and the pretensions of upper-class readers like Lady Cantire, who purport to desire “serious and improving” reading material while actually relishing *Society Snippets*. But it is also a commentary on the unmet expectations of both customers and booksellers at bookstalls. As a guide to readers, a catalogue like Mudie's had the advantage of being a printed document, long in preparation by a skilled compiler, and of being somewhat removed from the market, subscribers having paid a fee to use the library generally but not for the specific books they borrowed. Getting information about books straight from a human being, as was common in many Victorian bookshops and bookstalls, was, this brief vignette suggests, a different story. The clerk fails Lady Cantire through his superficial knowledge of the books and of her reading needs, evident in his humorously literal recommendations of serious and improving literature (*Three Hundred Ways of Dressing Cold Mutton*) and his swerve in the opposite direction when she declines (*Seven Hundred Side-splitters for Sixpence*). When pressed by Lady Cantire to be more thoughtful about his “responsibility” to circulate good books, the clerk attributes his ignorance to the forces of the market that delimit his accountability: after all, he is “paid to sell the books,” not “select ’em.” Framing books as commodities for purchase by customers (which is underscored by *Seven Hundred Side-splitters for Sixpence* including its price in its very title) and his own labor as a commodity for purchase by his employer, the clerk implies that in the context of the fast-paced railway bookstall, discriminating among literature is incompatible with selling it. Anstey does not let

Lady Cantire off the hook, either. Her irritation with the clerk could have been avoided if she had been a more forthcoming customer, doing her part to supply the clerk with relevant information rather than merely criticizing his lack of it.

This moment in *Punch* represents the late Victorians' wider interest in—and often, dissatisfaction with—the accuracy and depth of information about books extant in the interactions between booksellers and customers in an increasingly commercialized, rapidly growing literary market. As one contributor to *The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record* wryly observed of modern bookshop assistants generally, “We have all heard of the intelligent assistant who stated that, although he had not *Mill on Logic* in stock, he could supply *Mill on the Floss*.”<sup>2</sup> Such assistants were contrasted with booksellers who approached their work as a cultural mission and labor of love, as well as a business. For example, another commentator in the journal, J. Shaylor, praises the bookseller who has not only “business capabilities,” but also “a well-informed mind . . . always capable of development,” “who takes an interest in his trade because he loves books.”<sup>3</sup> The attention to booksellers' (and customers') degree and kind of information about books can be partially explained by the developing disjuncture between the cultural market for books and the economic market for books, as articulated by Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu argues that in the cultural market of the late nineteenth century, works of high art gained prestige through their contrast with more economically successful popular art; in much the same way, I suggest, a knowledgeable, and at least somewhat financially disinterested, bookseller might be defined against a bookseller who knows books only as objects with titles and prices.<sup>4</sup> This chapter explores the ways in which representations of book selection methods in bookshops distinguish cultured booksellers and readers from those invested only in books as commodities. In doing so, the chapter illuminates the Victorians' sense

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<sup>2</sup> C.Y., “The Intelligence of Booksellers' Assistants,” *The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record*, 17 Oct. 1891.

<sup>3</sup> “An Article on Bookselling,” *The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record*, 5 Dec. 1896. This article is a review of Shaylor's piece on bookselling in the nineteenth century.

<sup>4</sup> Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, 64-65.

that *how* books are sold (and not only *which* books are sold) characterizes books, readers, and the literary field as a whole.

Two sets of sources inform my study of Victorian bookselling. The first encompasses primarily periodical and newspaper accounts of the state of bookselling in the late nineteenth century. Overlaid onto the tension between bookselling as a mark of cultural achievement and bookselling as a way to earn money, these accounts bring out another tension encoded *within* booksellers' cultural work, one which speaks to and illuminates Bourdieu's theories of education and culture: the extent to which cultured booksellers are gatekeepers and the extent to which they are teachers. I then examine how this conflict is mediated in a cluster of Victorian and early twentieth-century novels representing secondhand bookshops. These novels include Charles Kingsley's *Alton Locke* (1850), Ouida's *The Tower of Taddeo* (1892), Mark Rutherford's *Clara Hopgood* (1896), and Arnold Bennett's *Riceman Steps* (1923). On the one hand, the novels frame secondhand bookshops as a bastion of the cultured, intimate book-buying experience that modern bookshops and stalls (like the one dramatized by Anstey) stand to obliterate. On the other hand, the fiction does not wholeheartedly privilege "literary" bookselling above bookselling as a trade. In the same vein as the newspaper and periodical accounts of bookselling, even as they evoke nostalgia for the knowledgeable, passionate bookseller, the novels demonstrate that in eschewing sales techniques in order to uphold an appreciation for books as works of art—and in order to enhance their own cultural capital—booksellers may compromise the self-defined other half of their work, its educative purpose. When information about books is embodied in the bookseller rather than visually available in bookshops, the novels suggest, customers' development as readers in their own right can be stunted. Further, the pointedly noncommercial aspects of their bookselling may themselves ironically become commercial, employed for financial profit.



Much of my analysis centers on the 1880s and 1890s, the period when *Punch* published Anstey's piece, because, as I will discuss, the traditional role of the bookseller was most obviously threatened at the end of the century. However, the chapter also reaches back to the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and stretches into the twentieth century. The Victorians' debates about bookselling in the 1880s and 1890s represent both a culmination of events that had been building in the book trade for decades, and a shift in tone as that culmination was achieved; looking to earlier sources shows in some cases the slow development of ideas about bookselling, and in other cases the sharp contrast in perspective over time. I venture as well to voices from the early twentieth century, since they offer a slightly retrospective sense of how bookselling changed during the Victorian period.

### **Retail bookselling up close in the nineteenth-century book trade**

Like catalogues, Victorian retail booksellers represent an understudied group of agents in what Bourdieu calls the "field of cultural production," being more typically subordinated to authors, publishers, critics, and various forms of advertising that shaped works' meaning within the field.<sup>5</sup> When bookselling is the star of the story of the nineteenth-century book trade, its importance seems to derive from its diminishing position relative to other entities in the production and circulation of books. From contemporary studies like that of Henry Curwen, who claimed in his *History of Booksellers, the Old and the New* (1873) to be the very first to provide a history of the English book trade, to John Feather's similar attempt in the 1980s, historians unanimously describe the shrinking influence of booksellers as the book trade transitioned from a "parochial" to a free trade model.<sup>6</sup>

In the eighteenth century, the account goes, retail booksellers *were* the book trade, having, as Curwen writes, "to do everything for themselves," including printing the books—and even

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<sup>5</sup> Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, 37.

<sup>6</sup> Feather, *A History of British Publishing* 131, 172; Curwen, *A History of Booksellers, the Old and the New*; Mumby, *Publishing and Bookselling: A History from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*.

constructing the presses on which books were printed—before selling them.<sup>7</sup> “Bookseller” and “publisher” were often used interchangeably. For example, a “bookseller” is criticized in the preface to *Northanger Abbey* (1818) for his “extraordinary” behavior in purchasing Jane Austen’s manuscript more than a decade earlier but then deciding not to publish; James Hogg similarly complains in the preface to *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) that his “booksellers” disapproved of an amendment he had tried to make to the title, and so he had been forced to let it stand as it ultimately appeared in print.<sup>8</sup> As these complaints indicate, booksellers’ centrality in printing, publishing, and circulating books gave them considerable leverage in the literary field: in novels, fictional writers are frequently depicted conversing with retail booksellers in their shops and trying—and more often than not failing—to have a manuscript accepted for publication.<sup>9</sup>

By the mid-nineteenth century, as I have mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, improved printing technology and lower paper prices, urbanization, and the newly sprawling railway system meant that books could be inexpensively mass-produced in a few places by the new major publishing companies and then transported across the country to densely populated towns, making retail booksellers’ role as small-scale publishers obsolete.<sup>10</sup> The scope of the bookseller gradually narrowed, until retail booksellers were merely one node in the book trade constellation, which included printers, publishers, and wholesalers who each took a piece of the job that booksellers had once done alone. While publishers and wholesalers profited from producing books on a large scale, retail booksellers suffered, unable to make money from selling much smaller quantities of cheap

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<sup>7</sup> Curwen, *A History of Booksellers*, 16-17.

<sup>8</sup> Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, *Lady Susan*, *The Watsons*, *Sandition*, 3; see the preface to Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*.

<sup>9</sup> See, as a few examples among many, Bage’s *Hermesprong; Or, Man as He Is Not*, 28; Barrett’s *The Heroine, Or Adventures of Cherubina*, 137; William Black’s *A Daughter of Heth*, 148; and Holcroft’s *The Adventures of Hugh Trevor*, 182.

<sup>10</sup> See Feather, *A History of British Publishing* 124-31 and Simon Eliot, *Some Patterns and Trends in British Publishing, 1800-1919*, 8, 106-07. Feather supports Curwen’s description of eighteenth-century bookselling, explaining that book copyrights were usually held by booksellers during that century; when authors began to assert more control over copyrights in the nineteenth century, copyright had shifted from booksellers to a new entity, publishers. See Feather, 163-64.

books. They were reduced to competing with each other through discounts so high that profit became impossible, and through grasping for the most popular books to stock, however short their shelf life.<sup>11</sup> When slumping retail book sales began to strain the whole trade by the 1880s, publishers finally responded to booksellers' and authors' request for them to establish fixed prices for books in the Net Book Agreement of 1900, which reduced the downward trend of discounting and stabilized booksellers' profit margins. Although the agreement improved booksellers' profits, it can be seen as symbolic of the end of booksellers' key role as central *creators* in the literary field. With the coalescing of the different interest groups—publishers, booksellers, authors—and their system of internal regulation, the book trade had become, in Feather's words, "a modern industry in every way."<sup>12</sup>

This narrative, however, neglects an element of the book trade that was clearly of concern to writers like Anstey: the ways in which, through their minute, daily interactions with customers, retail booksellers could continue to exert influence over what was read and how, and the ways in which readers' *feeling* about their experience in a bookshop reflected on books and on literary culture more broadly during this era of commercialization. As Robert Darnton asserted in 1990, book historians should recognize "the bookseller as a cultural agent," whose "social and intellectual world" and "values and tastes" influenced book circulation in their communities, a claim that Wallace Kirsop reiterated in a review of the literature on book history nearly a decade later.<sup>13</sup> The relative absence of scholarly work on Victorian retail bookselling at the level of customer interaction is incommensurate with the Victorians' own anxiety about the relationship between booksellers' education and attitude toward books and readers' intellectual and cultural well-being.

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<sup>11</sup> Feather, *A History of British Publishing*, 138-39. See also Mumby, *Publishing and Bookselling*, 288. Booksellers' despair is evident as well in the fiction of the period: consider, for example, the misanthropic bookseller in Thomas Hardy's *The Hand of Ethelberta* (1876), who declares that "country bookselling is a miserable, impoverishing, exasperating thing in these days" (30).

<sup>12</sup> Feather, *A History of British Publishing*, 131.

<sup>13</sup> Darnton, "What Is the History of Books?", 130.

Studies of retail bookselling in Victorian England and elsewhere have usefully illuminated aspects of what might be called the “book shopping experience,” through methods such as reconstructing the locations of historical bookshops, analyzing sales records, or studying the demographics of shops’ customers.<sup>14</sup> Yet, these analyses stop short of illustrating the *interaction* between booksellers and customers, the ephemeral exchange of information and advice about books, or, in the case of Victorian studies, of explicating the distinct discourse that surrounded those interactions. There is of course a reason: Kirsop points out that historical readers’ experiences, inside a book shop or outside of it, are notoriously difficult to document because the full interaction between a bookseller and a customer “cannot be confined to ledgers, day-books, catalogues, prospectuses, and subscriber lists, even if most of these sources promise immediate knowledge of customers and of their tastes.”<sup>15</sup> But by turning to sources besides those that provide concrete, quantitative data about book circulation—including newspaper editorials and trade journal articles that articulate booksellers’ point of view about their profession—it is possible to analyze the Victorians’ perceptions of how booksellers served as “cultural agents.” Fictional representations of bookselling offer additional insight, partly by depicting the experiences of customers in bookshops in full, if imagined, detail. The novels also provide perspective on bookselling’s cultural role in the

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<sup>14</sup> A few examples: Peter Blayney and James Raven have reconstructed the locations of bookshops in St. Paul’s Churchyard, the center of the book trade in London during the seventeenth century, producing maps that show what customers might have seen if they went book shopping. See Blayney, *The Bookshops in St. Paul’s Cross Churchyard, Occasional Papers of the Bibliographical Society* and Raven, “Memorializing a London Bookscape: The Mapping and Reading of Paternoster Row and St. Paul’s Churchyard, 1695-1814,” in R.C. Alston 177-200. Alison Rukavina has studied how late-nineteenth century British readers in the colonies became informed about books from home by middlemen who created circulars to advertise publishers’ stock. See Rukavina, “A Victorian Amazon.com: Edward Petherick and His Colonial Booksellers’ Agency,” 104-21. Troy Bassett and Christina Walter have used the sales records in the trade journal *The Bookman* to analyze trends in bestselling books during the 1890s and early twentieth century (Bassett and Walter, “Booksellers and Bestsellers: British Book Sales as Documented by *The Bookman*, 1891-1906,” 205-36). Others, including Darnton in his sample study of the eighteenth-century French bookseller Isaac-Pierre Rigaud, have more closely examined the personal histories of booksellers and the types of books particular bookshops sold, as a window into the reading tastes of specific sets of customers. See, for instance, Juliette Atkinson’s study of the Victorian bookshop of William Jeffs (“William Jeffs, Victorian Bookseller and Publisher of French Literature,” 257-78); Elizabeth Carroll Reilly’s study of an eighteenth-century Boston bookshop (“The Wages of Piety: The Boston Book Trade of Jeremy Condry,” 83-131); and Cynthia and Gregory Stiversons’ study of a large retail bookshop in eighteenth-century Virginia (“The Colonial Retail Book Trade: Availability and Affordability of Reading Material in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Virginia,” 132-73).

<sup>15</sup> Kirsop, “Booksellers and Their Customers,” 290-91.

ways that they exhibit, or do not exhibit, self-awareness about their own potential to be commodities in the hands of booksellers and customers.

### **The crisis of the informed bookseller**

As I have suggested, one paradigm in the Victorian debates about bookselling is a distinction between booksellers peddling commodities (like the clerk in *Punch*) and booksellers resembling those Shaylor describes, who view their profession as “high” cultural work and a work of love without obvious or excessive concern for money. In this sense bookselling reinforces Bourdieu’s argument that commercial success in the literary field comes to have an inverse relationship to artistic value, only applied to booksellers rather than to authors and their works.<sup>16</sup> Cultured booksellers disdain popular literature, as well as the flashy advertising methods with which it is associated, loudly loving art for its own sake in a society in which too few are appreciative of its worth. Their cultural “job,” so to speak, is to impose their standards on others, as Bourdieu suggests that those with cultural capital use their power to maintain the dominance of their version of culture and taste.

As opposed to advertising that uses information solely to encourage purchases, bookselling was understood to be a more complicated endeavor, in that many Victorians saw bookselling not only as a process of selling books, but also as part of a cultural mission to educate the public. Among others, Rachel Bowlby has noted that the divide between literature as a trade and literature as art had a parallel in the divide between the “masses” of readers and cultivated readers.<sup>17</sup> While Victorians often assumed such classifications of readers were self-forming and self-contained, as along class or gender lines, for example, one of the cultivated bookseller’s ostensible responsibilities was to do the work of curating, to use his or her knowledge to form the tastes of all readers. A central problem emerging in Victorian reflections on bookselling, I suggest, is the conflict between upholding a dominant literary (and social) culture through bookselling, and *informing* readers about

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<sup>16</sup> Bourdieu, *Rules of Art*, 217-19.

<sup>17</sup> Bowlby, *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing and Zola*, 94.

that culture through bookselling. While informing readers about literature would seem necessary for honoring and preserving its high status, informing mass readers about books is also of course antithetical to that purpose, as it “lets in” the so-called undeserving and thereby lowers the status of the dominant culture.

Bourdieu’s theories on the transfer of information in education offer an analogous picture of this conflict in another setting. In his study of French universities, Bourdieu argues that typical “pedagogic communication” between professors and students—including dense academic language and the physical arrangement of classrooms that puts distance between teacher and student—continues to “perpetuate itself even when the information transmitted tends toward zero.”<sup>18</sup> Although the customs of the university prevent students from learning, the educational system “utterly fail[ing] to achieve its most specific end,” the same forms of teaching persist because they have an implicit alternative purpose, to “legitimate the dominant culture” by keeping the key to it in the hands of the institution and the professors who represent it.<sup>19</sup> Students either fail to imitate what they are “taught,” and thus fail in the university system, or they succeed in imitation without actually internalizing information and knowledge, keeping up the appearance of learning without its reality. Along these lines, Victorian commentators on bookselling, including novelists, were sensitive in varying degrees to the ways in which booksellers’ interests as “teachers” met but also undermined customers’ interests as readers. Their perspectives demonstrate how Bourdieu’s reflections on education apply in the context of bookselling, and they illuminate a range of ways through which cultural capital and education, the identity of the bookseller and the identity of the customer, clash. As they make evident, to shape the average reader’s taste required not only the love of art, but an

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<sup>18</sup> Bourdieu, *Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture*, 108-09. See the entire chapter on “The Literate Tradition and Social Conservation” for details on “pedagogic communication” at the university.

<sup>19</sup> Bourdieu, *Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture*, 123.

equal love of—or at least a respect for—people, including those with distasteful literary tastes, highlighting the tension between elitist preservation and democratic education in bookselling.

Comparing modern bookselling practices to those of the past, in an editorial of 1900 Walter Besant suggests that a primary distinction is booksellers' and customers' knowledge of and attention to books. In the past, Besant writes, "the position of the bookseller was far above that of the ordinary tradesman; he knew the books which he sold; there was about him a clinging suggestion of scholarship; he knew what his customers wanted."<sup>20</sup> Those customers comprised "scholars, divines, antiquaries, poets, and 'wits,'" a small but sufficiently wealthy and educated group who actually purchased books. By contrast, the bookshop has now been replaced by stores that pretend to sell books but that are actually as full of "stationery, photograph albums, desks, 'fancy' things, birthday presents, Christmas cards, and even toys" as they are of books, where works are "no longer displayed on a table or counter as the newest and best books of the day."

The implicit demotion of books from literature to mere objects among other objects, even in shops that purportedly sell mainly books, reflects the new commodity culture. Popular literature, not only in its outward form but also in its inner structure, could itself already be characterized as mass-producible and object-like. Sensation fiction is a good example: as Margaret Oliphant noted in an 1867 review of the state of fiction, authors of the emerging sensation genre replicate each other's works to the extent that their novels appear as "stolen goods."<sup>21</sup> In another review, H. L. Mansel describes the "commercial atmosphere," redolent of the manufactory, that surrounds the sales of such fiction. "The public want novels," he laments, "and novels must be made—so many yards of printed stuff, sensation-pattern, to be ready by the beginning of the season."<sup>22</sup> By the late part of the century, the "commercial atmosphere" of popular fiction was manifest in the ways books were

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<sup>20</sup> Besant, "Problems of Bookselling in England," *The New York Times*, 21 Jan 1900.

<sup>21</sup> Oliphant, "Novels," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, Sept. 1867.

<sup>22</sup> Mansel, "Sensation Novels," *Quarterly Review*, 1863.

displayed physically among other objects. Where books had often been grouped with other items for sale in the past, especially in smaller towns where selling multiple wares was essential for shops' survival, late-nineteenth century booksellers were likely motivated to include "fancy" items in their stock to match customers' desires for what Andrew Miller calls "elaborate fantasies of [commodity] consumption" and what Bowlby identifies as a new pleasure in looking and shopping at the turn of the century.<sup>23</sup> The invention of plate glass and the mass production of wares combined to make more items for sale more visible than ever before, leading in turn to window dressing becoming a full-fledged profession and a necessity in bookshops as well as other kinds of stores.<sup>24</sup> As one American commentator, Hildegard Hawthorne, suggested in a 1909 editorial on American bookshops, the "demand for noise and display" in bookshops had transformed them into "sparkling marts" where customers are "lured" in by attractive "picture puzzles and fountain pens" as much as by books.<sup>25</sup>

In keeping with their un-bookish stock, Besant observes that the modern bookseller "knows little of the books which he offers for sale," and carries only popular novels rather than a carefully selected supply of literature. If popular literature was manufactured—printed off like "so many yards of printed stuff" in pattern, as Mansel suggests—the interactions between bookseller and customer

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<sup>23</sup> See Andrew Miller, *Novels Behind Glass: Commodity Culture and Victorian Narrative*, 1; Bowlby, *Just Looking*, 6. For more information on eighteenth and early-nineteenth century bookshops carrying goods other than books to survive in smaller markets, see the introduction to Horn, *Behind the Counter: Shop Lives from Market Stall to Supermarket*; Reilly, "The Wages of Piety," 90; and Stiverson, "The Colonial Retail Trade," 144.

<sup>24</sup> For examples of literature describing the rise of window dressing, and some of its particulars in bookselling, see "A Hint to Booksellers," *The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record*, 21 Nov. 1896; *A Guide to Window-Dressing*, Rpt. from *The Warehousemen and Drapers' Trade Journal*, 1883; "The Profession of Bookselling," *The Newsman*, 1891; G.R. Timmins, *Window Dressing: The Principles of "Display,"*; and "Window Dressing an Art," *The Newsman*, 1891.

<sup>25</sup> Hawthorne, "Changing Phases in Bookselling: Modern 'Commercialism' Forces the Old-Time Bookshop to the Wall—Interesting Features of Retail Trade," *The New York Times*, 10 Apr. 1909. Hawthorne's editorial demonstrates how the "crisis" of overly commercialized bookselling in Britain could be a matter of perspective and could change rapidly in short periods of time. Although she critiques American bookshops on similar grounds to those on which Besant critiques British bookshops, Hawthorne sees British bookshops as a mainstay of the older, book-focused method of bookselling. She specifically cites the Net Book Agreement, which came into effect around the time of Besant's editorial, as the reason for the difference, as it allowed British booksellers to relax enough about profits to return to bookselling as a "labor of love." In general, America was also considered a leader in advertising and display, and British book trade journals often refer British booksellers to Americans as an example for how to arrange their windows.



surrounding not only popular, but all literature, was similarly manufactured. For instance, Hawthorne supports Besant's sense that booksellers have a scant appreciation for the literary by avowing that book shop clerks "measure out so much literature to you very much as they might measure out ribbon or calico," and noting that both sellers' and buyers' knowledge of books is limited to their most superficial elements. She quotes a clerk to illustrate this point: "A woman came in the other day," he reports, "and asked for a book—didn't know the title or who it was by, but was certain it had a green cover with a man's face on it. We got it for her." An 1886 interview with a successful British bookseller, Stoneham, confirms the shift from knowledge of text to knowledge of book-object in modern bookshops, from the perspective of a bookseller himself.<sup>26</sup> Stoneham has little information to offer about the contents of books that sell compared with their external features, reporting that books with "attractive covers, in bold colours, combinations of gold and red, or blue and silver, depicting some thrilling incident in the volume," are sure to attract customers and make a sale.

Although Besant admires the knowledgeable booksellers of yore, he is also pragmatic about ushering bookselling into the new era, perhaps more so than Hawthorne. He argues, in fact, that booksellers do too *little* advertising, unwisely retaining the "tradition" of former booksellers to "not 'push' their wares," which causes "the unthinking folk who in all other trades are invited and pressed to come in [to] pass by" the bookshop. Besant's contrast between the commodity spectacle of current bookshops and former bookshops, where works were "displayed on a table or counter as the newest and best books of the day," suggests not a dismissal of visual advertising, but a different focus for it. Putting a renewed emphasis in advertising on books and their contents—their newness but also their quality (the "best books of the day")—Besant prioritizes informing the mass readership about literature and guiding them to good options. He carves a middle space between the

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<sup>26</sup> "A Great Bookseller and What He Sells: An Interview with Mr. Stoneham," *The Times of India*, 16 June 1886.

older booksellers who could presume their educated, already-literary customers' existing familiarity with books on the one hand, and, on the other hand, booksellers' more recent reduction of bookselling to total spectacle, as exemplified by Stoneham and his association of books with color combinations (although interestingly, when asked to identify the bestselling author in his shop, Stoneham names Walter Besant!). Besant's language indicates his wish to elevate the bookseller again above the "ordinary tradesman," but in a manner that at once accommodates the literary needs of a growing reading public and the financial needs of the modern bookseller.

In some representations of bookselling in the late nineteenth century, however, the middle-of-the-road approach Besant describes is confounded by nostalgia for the more scholarly bookselling of the past. As Besant's list of regulars at former bookshops suggests, booksellers "guided" an elite group—wits, scholars, poets, all with enough money to purchase expensive books—who presumably needed little guidance, forming more of an exclusive, highly cultured club than a site of commerce. If, as Miller indicates, plate glass could distance consumers from commodities even while it heightened their desire for them, the traditional learned bookshop was implicitly a barrier between all of the readers who were not scholars and wits and the books held within the shop, an enviable society of readers with the power to determine cultural standards by which others were judged.<sup>27</sup> The conflicting versions of bookseller in Besant's discussion are pronounced in the debates about a proposed standardized qualifying exam for bookshop assistants, designed by the Booksellers' Society in 1892 and much discussed in *The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record*. The commentators clearly stake out a distinction between trade booksellers and what they define as cultured booksellers through their positions toward the exam; at the same time, the debates subtly indicate that the role of the cultured bookseller in the age of mass readership is itself in flux, and cannot be sufficiently defined through a simple opposition to tradesmen.

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<sup>27</sup> Andrew Miller, *Novels Behind Glass*, 5.

The exam, which was actually administered to a small number of assistants for a year or two and then apparently fizzled out, was a response to a widespread feeling among booksellers that assistants no longer had the book knowledge necessary for the trade. This decline in assistants' education was not unique to bookselling, but reflective of the changes that most trades underwent in the late nineteenth century, as there were more goods (including books) to be familiar with, and further, as the market for numerous independent shops narrowed in the face of nascent department store and retail chains, such as the railway bookstall company of W.H. Smith. Where once skilled apprentices interacted one-on-one with customers to help them with purchases, educated in a trade for many years as they prepared to begin their own business, over the Victorian era apprentices became short-term workers who, in the words of Lee Holcombe, "received no regular instruction and merely picked up knowledge of the trade as best they could."<sup>28</sup> The exam assessed assistants' knowledge in four areas: "authors and their works," "the published price of books," "the best works on stated subjects," and (prospective) employees' competence in basic accounting tasks.<sup>29</sup> The mixture of literary knowledge ("authors and their works") with market knowledge ("the published price of books") speaks to the blending of scholarly and trade knowledge of books, but commentaries weighted these elements differently in analyses of whether the exams were worthwhile.

On the one hand, some commentators embrace improved trade as the primary goal of assistants' education. A means through which assistants may prove that they are modern employees, the exam would assess, in the words of one editorial, "competency," "industry," and "knowledge in particular directions and of special subjects" to their work.<sup>30</sup> Acknowledging the varieties of assistants and their circumstances, some argued that assistants should not be expected to go beyond a business-variety knowledge of books. As one country bookshop assistant wrote, if the exam tests

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<sup>28</sup> Qtd. in Horn, *Behind the Counter*, xvi-xvii.

<sup>29</sup> "The London Booksellers' Society," *The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record*, 18 June 1892.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

“practical” rather than “technical” knowledge of books, “practical” meaning that familiarity that can be established only through “daily intercourse with books,” then assistants, and especially those in country shops, are at an unfair disadvantage: they are already “required to have a fair knowledge of Books and Stationery, and often a knowledge of Fancy Goods or Printing,” such that they cannot “afford to fix [their] whole attention on one department, viz.—Books.”<sup>31</sup>

Such a bookseller or assistant might be comparable to what Besant aims for in modern-day bookselling, guides who are familiar enough with books and motivated by sales to function like a twenty-first-century search engine for customers. Describing this kind of bookselling, an 1893 *Publishers' Circular* article indicates how it privileges sales and superficial familiarity with books over deeper concerns about reading and reading material. In the barrage of books facing a customer at Christmas-time, the writer declares,

a pitiable sense of the limitations of human capacity weigh[s] upon the prospective buyer. He cannot hope to possess or read more than a mere fraction of what attracts him. The question of selection therefore becomes a serious one. What is to be the investment for the sons and daughters, the nephews and nieces and grandchildren, who are already counting the days that must pass ere the Christmas presents are due? Will it be sumptuous picture books, or rousing tales of travel and adventure, or stories of quiet domestic interest? The variety is indeed bewildering, and the tendency is towards ever deeper and deeper bewilderment. When Christmas publications were few it was an easy task to choose, but now the attractions are so numerous as to be fairly distracting. It is at a time like this that the efficient bookseller's assistant has a chance of proving his capabilities by getting his patrons triumphantly out of their haze of doubt and perplexity. Most purchasers are grateful for a friendly and intelligent hint when choosing gift-books.<sup>32</sup>

Although the writer asserts that “the question of selection” is “serious,” the only thing that really seems serious about it for the customer is surviving the “deep bewilderment” produced by the array of commodities. The “triumph” consisting mainly of escaping “doubt and perplexity,” the bookseller assistant's job is less to guide a reader to the perfect gift book than to get the customer to

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<sup>31</sup> A Country Assistant, “Examinations for Booksellers' Assistants,” *The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record*, 2 July 1892.

<sup>32</sup> “To such as are imbued,” *The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record*, 25 Nov. 1893.

focus—on what, it hardly seems to matter, since the customer does not even know if the child he or she is purchasing for prefers picture books, adventure tales, or domestic stories. The bedazzled customer is not a reader but a “prospective buyer” making an “investment”; the assistant is not a scholar, as Besant describes booksellers of the past, but is “efficient” and “friendly,” an intelligent “hinter” rather than teacher.

Many commentators on the exams were not content to relegate bookselling just to trade and continued to push for the “clinging suggestion of scholarship” in bookselling that Besant suggests is gone. For example, while the editorial naming “competency” and “industry” as the goals of the exam argues in favor of the assessment on the grounds that it efficiently professionalizes the trade, the writer contradicts himself by suggesting that quality bookselling requires more than a mental database of facts. Although he claims that “the essential qualifications of a bookseller’s assistant are such as may be easily tried by an examiner,” in the next sentence he qualifies the “ease” with which these traits can be identified:

Not that [these qualities] are of a common kind. It is appalling indeed, when one comes to think of it, how much the ideal bookseller ought to know. He must be an expert in books; that is to say, he should be able to tell offhand the author, subject, style, price, age, and publisher of any work about which a customer might casually inquire, and to his literary and commercial information he should add a profound knowledge of human nature.<sup>33</sup>

Here, a bookseller’s qualifications shift rapidly from “information”—facts about the market (a book’s price or publisher) and basic literary features (the author or subject)—to “a profound *knowledge* of human nature.” Another writer, who opposed the exams precisely because they could not measure such qualities, described the “bookselling faculty” as both “real” and “difficult to define,” reflecting the vagueness but importance with which a bookseller’s intelligence was viewed.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> “The London Booksellers’ Society,” *The Publishers’ Circular and Booksellers’ Record*, 18 June 1892.

<sup>34</sup> “A correspondent signing himself an ‘Emancipated Bookman,’” *The Publishers’ Circular and Booksellers’ Record*, 23 July 1892.

Even as a trade, bookselling remains set apart, demanding the highest—perhaps unreasonable—qualities in its employees.

Higher standards for booksellers reflected a loftier vision of bookselling's purpose, in which booksellers' knowledge and intelligence prepares them to be critics, influencers, and upholders of the best books. This view hearkened to the bookselling values of the past. In the 1830s, for example, the bookseller and future publisher MacLehose had described bookselling as a divine calling, booksellers the filter and conduit through which only the best literature reaches readers, and in the right way: "We booksellers, if we are faithful to our task, are trying to destroy, and are helping to destroy, all kinds of confusion, and are aiding our great Taskmaster to reduce the world into order and beauty and harmony."<sup>35</sup> Diagnosing the decline in the quality of bookselling in the 1850s, which he associates with a loss of spiritual culture generally, Thomas Carlyle argued that in the previous century booksellers' work in publishing, though mercenary and "prosaic," must nevertheless be acknowledged for its "real usefulness, respectability and merit to the world," and booksellers "thankfully remembered" for identifying and supporting projects that further knowledge.<sup>36</sup>

Defenders of booksellers as the facilitators of "order," "beauty," and "harmony" were dissatisfied with the mere practical steps Besant suggests for bookselling in the modern day—a basic knowledge of books, a good book display, an advertising circular. Shaylor, for instance, raises but rejects the possibility that advertising books is a sufficient form of guidance, asserting instead that it is the intelligence of the bookseller—that indefinable combination of literary, commercial, and human knowledge—that matters most in bookselling.<sup>37</sup> A turn-of-the-century article similarly argues that bookselling is a "liberal profession," and that as such, a bookseller should be "intelligent" rather than "mechanical"; another writer adds that the (nonexistent) "perfect bookseller" would embody

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<sup>35</sup> Qtd. in Mumby, *Publishing and Bookselling*, 247.

<sup>36</sup> Qtd. in Curwen, *A History of Booksellers*, 64-65.

<sup>37</sup> "An Article on Bookselling," *The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record*, 5 Dec. 1896.

an astonishing set of intellectual accomplishments, “know[ing] everything about everything, [including] science, art, literature, commerce, politics, law, and other things.”<sup>38</sup>

Each of these writers asserts that these attributes should be applied toward a cultural mission: “to contribute to the formation of taste,” “to [guide] the studies and [mature] the taste” of the reading public by nudging “buyers into the right literary paths,” to be “literary critics to their customers” concerned, in Shaylor’s words, with making “more than a bare living.” These characterizations elevate bookselling to the realm of what John Stuart Mill calls “the art of living”—the development of a rich mental culture—above the “art of getting on,” mere economic concerns.<sup>39</sup> Those sharing the point of view of figures like MacLehose, Carlyle, and Shaylor supported (or in some cases, opposed) the assistant exams based on the extent to which they furthered this cultural mission of bookselling. As one assistant declared quite grandly in explaining why he advocated the exams,

I am one of the many (as I hope) who are anxious to clear the bookselling trade of all ‘job’ traders and all who have not a proper pride in the dignity of their calling (to me there is only one more noble than that of a bookseller—the preacher’s). . . . The day is not past which required a bookseller to be a gentleman and a scholar—at any rate, a man of awakened intelligence.<sup>40</sup>

As a cultural endeavor, bookselling is here a vocation, not a trade, however tainted it may inevitably be with trade associations. One might think, reading these editorials, that those who sell books surpass in honor and intellect even those who *write* them, nobly mediating between customer and book to ensure readers’ cultural development, both in helping them to choose the right text and in guiding their study of them.

Yet, there are hints in this language that what appears to be a unified purpose to shape the tastes of the mass reading public cuts in two potentially opposing directions. All of the

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<sup>38</sup> “Bookselling as a Liberal Profession,” *The Globe*, 27 Aug. 1902; “The Perfect Bookseller,” *The Publishers’ Circular and Booksellers’ Record*, 16 May 1896.

<sup>39</sup> Mill, *Principles of Political Economy: With Some of Their Applications to Social Philosophy*, 191.

<sup>40</sup> Saxton, “Examinations for Booksellers’ Assistants,” *The Publishers’ Circular and Booksellers’ Record*, 25 June 1892.

commentators associate bookselling with educated people and imply that, if not in a lower class economically speaking, customers lack the knowledge and taste booksellers possess. But the extent to which booksellers see themselves as servants of a public in need versus servants of the literature that they circulate differs. Consider, for instance, the varying analogies they use to describe bookselling. The terms “gentleman” and “scholar” connote intelligent, and perhaps beneficent, men, but they also imply a certain degree of inwardness, a focus on self-cultivation and a passion for the object of study; this view registers differently from that of bookseller as “literary critic for customers” or especially as (almost) comparable to a “preacher,” both of which foreground a lay audience expanding beyond those who are like-minded and suggest a degree of attempted understanding between teacher and student. The former emphasizes the knowledge held by the bookseller, where the latter emphasizes how knowledge *transfers* from bookseller to another, the actual accomplishment of “pedagogic communication” that Bourdieu suggests may be thwarted by the scholar’s language, manner, and use of space. The first suggests that booksellers represent a learned community, and the second denotes bookselling as a community-building action. These elements need not necessarily be mutually exclusive, but when writers are compelled to grapple with what bookselling actually looks like on the ground, they often end up so.

In Victorian representations of bookselling, customers’ perceived ignorance, poor taste, and contrary behavior in bookshops—attributes implied in Anstey’s criticism of Lady Cantire—can put unbridgeable distance between booksellers and potential readers as much as it encourages booksellers to nudge “buyers into the right literary paths.” Suggesting that booksellers are helpless to “fix” culturally illiterate customers—that customers’ taste and cultural awareness derive from their nature, and not from a shaping environment—booksellers’ disdainful attitudes toward readers at times shifts a potentially educative situation into a static comparison of the states of knowledge of those involved. One defensive bookseller, for example, places the blame for the commercialization



of bookselling squarely on customers' shoulders: those who are critical of booksellers do not realize, the author writes, "how very few people really care about books either to read or to buy," which is evident by their taking no measures to come to shops already informed about literature.<sup>41</sup>

The article relates a typical customer's approach to asking for Margaret Barber's *The Roadmender* (1902), a set of religious meditations, in a shop: "Have you got the book that was published last week?—er, I forgot the name, but you'll know; it came out last week, and there was a very good review of it.' Or, 'What's that book that everybody's talking about just now? I mean that book about a road—little essays, you know?'" Here, the bookshop customer is in the position of the bookstall assistant in the *Punch* vignette, who determines the "serious" book he has been requested to procure must be something with a title like *Three Hundred Ways of Dressing the Cold Mutton*, and also resembles the American customer who asked for a book with a green cover featuring a man's face. The writer further associates readers' ignorance of books' insides with their "unreasonable" treatment of bookshops as one-stop centers, places to ask "for notepaper, postcards, the address of lodgings, the name of a good cook, the day the 'Academy' is published, the way to Regent's Park, a summarized account of 'The Eternal City,' or a condensed version of 'La Maison du Peche.'" "Possibly it is this constant demand on [the customer's] part," the article concludes, "which is inducing the harassed bookseller to add stationery, labels, and Christmas cards to his stock." Interested in anything but reading, the article suggests, customers bring corruption—and commodities—into the bookshop, making it impossible for a bookseller to help them select the perfect book.

Reminiscences of the customers Besant describes, of "scholars, divines, antiquaries, poets, and 'wits,'" heightens the dissatisfaction with the current, mass reading public: the bookseller's description of *The Roadmender* encounter strongly implies that the arrival of ill-informed customers to

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<sup>41</sup> "The Utopian Bookshop: Some Comments of the Bookselling Trade," *The Manchester Guardian*, 16 July 1903.

bookshops is a new and unwelcome phenomenon. Non-fiction and fictional representations of bookshops from earlier eras to some extent support this notion. Bookshops of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries are often described as gathering places for the elite, which is unsurprising given books' expense. A contributor to the *Washington Post* in 1914, for example, reports in a tone of awe about his visit to a bookshop in Edinburgh that was owned by an elderly gentleman, who could recall serving Walter Scott and other famous literary men in the 1820s.<sup>42</sup> A similar sense of amazement at the intimacy between bookshops and writers underlies Robert Browning's poem "Memorabilia" (1855), which begins with the speaker's astonishment at meeting a person who knew Percy Shelley in the flesh. As William DeVane explains in his exposition of the piece, an experience that Browning had in a bookshop likely inspired this poem: visiting one day "the shop of Hodgson, the well-known London bookseller," Browning once recalled, he overheard a stranger telling the bookseller "of something Shelley had once said to him."<sup>43</sup> The bookshop was also represented as a natural site for less eminent but well-educated individuals, such as Paul Emanuel of Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853), who has "his cigar and his lounge" as he reads the paper in his friend M. Miret's bookshop.<sup>44</sup>

Common sense suggests, however, that in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries all customers in all types of bookshops could not have been so educated and serious about high culture. Representations in fact indicate a wider range, describing bookshops as gathering places for readers of varying degrees of literariness or even for non-readers to come to participate in book culture, loosely defined. For instance, Elizabeth Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters* (1866), which is set in the 1830s, features Grinstead's book shop, which was "the centre of news, and the club, as it were, of

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<sup>42</sup> "Octogenarian Bookseller," *Washington Post*, 11 Jan. 1914.

<sup>43</sup> DeVane, *A Browning Handbook*, 243-44.

<sup>44</sup> Brontë, *Villette*, 271.

the little town” of Hollingford.<sup>45</sup> Grinstead’s is a place for avid readers like Molly Gibson to purchase and discuss books, but it is also a place for genteel people and residents of the town to circulate in order to keep up appearances: they “subscribed to it as a sort of duty belonging to their station, without often using their privilege of reading the books,” many “privately [thinking] reading a great waste of time.” Similarly, although booksellers were frequently described as key figures in customers’ book selection processes, referred to with possessive pronouns in the common phrase “my bookseller,” customers were not always depicted as the intellectual equals of booksellers, nor were booksellers’ recommendations always reflective of a discerning cultural judgment.<sup>46</sup> Worried that her taste will be judged by those who see the novels she has in her home, for instance, one character in Maria Edgeworth’s *Patronage* (1814) shifts the blame to her bookseller: to judge her, she declares, “would be condemning me for the crimes of my bookseller, who will send us down every thing new that comes out.”<sup>47</sup>

Perhaps more a romanticized trope than a firm reality, then, the notion that bookselling and book shopping was in the past a high culture endeavor helps to explain why some late-nineteenth-century booksellers clung to gatekeeping as a cultural mission, even as the state of the trade demanded of them either a more nurturing role toward readers on the one hand, or more savvy advertising on the other. Representing secondhand bookshops with highly educated, admired booksellers, the novels that I take up in the second part of this chapter test the educative limits of cultured booksellers. Stretching from the mid-nineteenth century, when the book trade was beginning its expansion, to the 1920s, when the book market was fully commercialized, the novels feature booksellers who deliberately resist the strategies of shops like Stoneham’s, maintaining

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<sup>45</sup> Gaskell, *Wives and Daughters*, 168.

<sup>46</sup> In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels, characters often refer to their booksellers possessively. See lines from several of Frances Burney’s novels: Sir Hugh in *Camilla* (1796) receives a parcel of books “from his bookseller” (33); the title character in *Cecilia* (1782) escapes from tiring neighbors by going to “her bookseller” to peruse the latest publications (722).

<sup>47</sup> Edgeworth, *Patronage*, 148.

bookshops with few visual invitations for readers to learn about books. The chaos of these secondhand bookshops imposes its own kind of order upon the book-buying experience, imbuing the bookseller with knowledge and authority that necessitates an interaction between bookseller and customer and that attempts to ensure readers' appreciation of literature. Although they represent only one type of bookshop amongst an undoubtedly diverse group, together the novels illuminate both the potential success of such techniques for foregrounding books as more than commodities for readers and their inadequacy in giving customers the information and reading tools to *become* cultured readers, or even readers at all, threatening to undermine the existence of "cultured" bookshops in the modern world.

### **Culture and information in secondhand bookshops**

Representations of secondhand bookshops indicate a degree of Victorian nostalgia for old-fashioned "informed" bookselling. It is telling simply that there are so many detailed fictional depictions of individualized secondhand booksellers, in contrast to representations of booksellers at sites like the railway bookstalls, of which there seem to be fewer and which feature more anonymous (and self-anonymizing) booksellers like the clerk from the *Punch* example. Because secondhand booksellers were not primarily purchasing new books from the major publishers or attempting to profit from sales of the most current and popular literature, they could remain a stronghold of "traditional" bookselling—in which the bookseller plays as important a role in selecting books for readers as in selling books to them—in the midst of the modernization of the industry.

This is not to say that all secondhand bookshops were viewed as exemplary places to learn about books from a bookseller, for at least a couple of reasons. First, secondhand booksellers seem to have had a reputation for incompetence: in a scene in a secondhand bookshop in *Daniel Deronda* (1876), George Eliot assumes that secondhand booksellers' inadequacies are common knowledge. When Daniel, having chosen a book to purchase from an outdoor display, enters the shop to

purchase it, he anticipates a dissatisfying interaction with the bookseller, imagining that he will “see behind the counter a grimy personage showing that *nonchalance* about sales which seems to belong universally to the second-hand book-business.”<sup>48</sup> Nonchalance about sales is not here a compliment of booksellers’ tasteful disregard for money. The narrator elaborates: whereas ordinary tradesmen “are anxious to sell you their wares for your own welfare”—or in other words, to flatter customers and to push their wares with claims for their quality and usefulness, like the bookstall clerk in *Punch*—a secondhand bookseller is so jaded, and so uncertain of the value of his work in selling secondhand books, that he will not even pretend for the sake of sales. The secondhand bookseller Daniel actually meets in the shop is not a bookseller at all, but the passionate Zionist Mordecai, who is indifferent to sales but is not indifferent to Daniel’s reading selection, at least when he thinks Daniel’s choice of book may indicate their shared Jewish interests. Still, the narrator does not recant the description of secondhand bookselling as a deflated enterprise. “One is led to fear,” Eliot writes, “that a second-hand bookseller may belong to that unhappy class of men who have no belief in the good of what they get their living by, yet keep conscience enough to be morose rather than unctuous in their vocation.” Although indifferent to money, they are also skeptical of bookselling as a cultural mission. It is only the “exceptional second-hand bookseller,” Eliot suggests later in the novel, who even knows “the insides of books.”<sup>49</sup>

Second, as is suggested by Daniel’s own experience picking up a book that interests him, secondhand bookshops could be excellent places to browse. One American commentator in 1894, for instance, lamented the “well-classified shelves” and “courteous young clerk” of the modern bookshops, which made them seem fussy and “sterile” in contrast to the exciting aura of the “cavern”-like old secondhand bookshop, with “books in a mountain, propped up . . . by virtue of

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<sup>48</sup> George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, 385.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 519.

some cosmic force.”<sup>50</sup> Facilitated by the abundance of books stocked in no particular order, secondhand bookshops in this example are seen as inviting discovery and learning, even perhaps without the guidance of a bookseller.

However, the four examples of secondhand bookselling I have gathered from other works of fiction revise, or at least suggest an alternative to, these perspectives, as does the broader print culture. Like the writer who visited the bookseller who knew Walter Scott personally, others write of secondhand bookselling as a dying art, reminiscing about booksellers who act as an “old sage” for customers, booksellers who “[know] every volume of the thousands” in their shops, are “living encyclopedias of literary lore,” and are “shrewd judges of human nature” in helping customers to find books.<sup>51</sup> The booksellers in *Alton Locke*, *Clara Hopgood*, *The Tower of Taddeo*, and *Riceman Steps* present themselves as such sages, intimately familiar with “the insides of books” and with their own stock in particular. Further, although their disordered stock could theoretically be browsed, the narrators of each novel emphasize that the cavernous bookshops with mountains of books overwhelm customers so much that browsing is impossible, giving them recourse to only the bookseller for information and guidance.

Unlike Eliot’s “unhappy class of men who have no belief in the good of what they get their living by,” these booksellers are portrayed as deeply invested in the good of books and reading; but like Mordecai, whose intense interest in Daniel’s reading is brief and based on Daniel’s perceived usefulness to his cause, the booksellers’ interest is piqued only by certain customers in certain circumstances, qualifying the “good” of bookselling.<sup>52</sup> Reflecting in some cases their time period as

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<sup>50</sup> “About Removals of Bookshops: Reminiscences of an Era When Order Was Pedantic,” *The New York Times*, 10 June 1894.

<sup>51</sup> “Old Bookshops and Booksellers,” *The New York Times*, 5 Jan. 1902.

<sup>52</sup> As Daniel Hack points out, Mordecai’s general indifference in the bookshop is evidence of his similarity to apathetic, non-Jewish tradesmen (the “ordinary tradesman”), but his almost aggressive attempts to engage Daniel Deronda in conversation when he suspects his Jewish heritage reflects his similarity to the stereotypical Jewish tradesmen who will not let customers out of their grasp (*The Material Interests of the Victorian Novel*, 159-60). As my analysis suggests, that

well as their genre, the novels bring out different angles of the conflict between cultural elevation and information in bookselling, including the balance between the booksellers' agenda and readers' goals, the wisdom of booksellers offering too much or too little information, the degree of innateness of readers' taste, and the extent to which cultural education supports, undercuts, or exists entirely independent from financial gain. Further, the novels' representations of bookselling are to different degrees self-reflexive, hinting at novelists' sense of their own works as either objects to be peddled as commodities to uninformed readers or works of high culture circulating among informed booksellers and readers.

Kingsley's *Alton Locke*—much like, I will show, Rutherford's *Clara Hopgood* (Mark Rutherford being a pen name for William Hale White) and Ouida's *The Tower of Taddeo*—suggests that, in the transfer of information from cultured bookseller to ignorant customer, the bookseller's identity as a reader may compete with rather than enhance the customer's identity as a reader. *Alton Locke* was published in 1850, before the fully modern book trade developed, and compared with the other novels I consider, Kingsley's work exhibits less of a sense of disjuncture between the cultured secondhand bookshop and the commoditized broader bookselling culture. The novel instead incorporates bookselling into debates about education in general, and specifically the proper source of education for the working classes in the now-industrialized England. Fitting *Alton Locke*'s experiences in a bookshop within the plot of an industrial novel, in which not only a reader's growth but much broader social reform efforts are at stake, Kingsley dramatizes the social and political affinities that shape a bookseller's idea of good culture, and that in turn impose boundaries on what the less educated—and in this case, much poorer—customer learns about books. The books that *Alton Locke* reads under the tutelage of his knowledgeable bookseller, Sandy Mackaye, are critical to his journey in becoming a working-class poet, and in this sense, Mackaye's guidance epitomizes the

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contrast between general apathy and pointed interest is an important element in the trope of secondhand bookselling generally.

“divine mission” of the bookseller to disseminate knowledge and the best books to readers. At the same time, I suggest, Alton’s experience selecting books under Mackaye’s supervision, which looks inward toward Mackaye’s goals for Alton as much as outward to Alton himself, are representative of, and a contributing factor in, the widely recognized instability of Alton’s character. Alton’s association with the bookshop makes him a reader, but it also curtails him as a reader, in ways that have profound consequences for his life.

*Alton Locke* is a fictional autobiographical narrative of a working-class tailor and aspiring poet. Alton’s life is a chaotic journey: he moves from childhood in a repressive Baptist home, to adolescence working in the oppressive conditions of the clothing industry, to a young adulthood in which he attempts to become a poet while negotiating his vacillating loyalties between the Chartist movement and the values of the aristocratic friends he acquires. Finally, after Alton has abandoned both the Chartists and the aristocracy and leaves England to head a Christian socialist movement in America, he dies rather abruptly in Galveston, Texas, from an illness. The seeds of what turns out to be Alton’s lifelong intellectual maelstrom begin with a secondhand bookshop, owned by a Scottish bookseller named Sandy Mackaye, which Alton passes each day on his way home from work. In Mackaye’s shop, Alton not only first encounters inspiring literature but finds in Mackaye a mentor, who encourages him to serve the interests of his class by developing a distinct voice based on his life experiences.

Readings of *Alton Locke* tend to emphasize Mackaye as a stable figure in a novel that is constantly threatening to unravel. Few, in fact, have written about Kingsley’s novel without drawing attention to its fundamental incoherence, to its being, in Rosemarie Bodenheimer’s rendering, a novel that can typically be understood and appreciated only in pieces.<sup>53</sup> The root of the novel’s instability lies in the conflict between Kingsley’s goal to expose the evils of the clothing industry and

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<sup>53</sup> Bodenheimer, *The Politics of Story in Victorian Social Fiction*, 136.



the need for reform on the one hand, and on the other hand, his revulsion toward the political and social upheaval and violence that such a reform would entail. The result is that his protagonist bounces between Chartist radicalism and aristocratic conservatism and finally lands on an apolitical, religious approach to reform, the novel evincing overall, Bodenheimer argues, “a middle-class sensibility in which the tensions created by class sympathy have deepened into something like pathology.”<sup>54</sup> Alton’s indecisiveness has been characterized in various ways: as an oscillation between a desire for pastoral purity and aristocratic privilege; as the product of Kingsley’s conflicting representations of free will and determinism; as a result of the incompatible narrative forms he must occupy in the novel; or as the result of other conflicts, such as that between individual and collective identity, political and personal cultivation, timeless and circumstantial identity, and the various competing forms of economic, cultural, social, and religious capital that surface in Alton’s life.<sup>55</sup>

Against Alton’s perpetually confused stance, Mackaye stands out as one of the more reasoned and consistent voices in the novel, “the most fully realized character” that Kingsley creates, in Gallagher’s words.<sup>56</sup> Mackaye’s coherence doubtless results partly from his being based on an actual person, Carlyle, and his embodying a Carlylean philosophy of non-violent, culturally based social reform.<sup>57</sup> Mackaye has clear ideas for how Alton’s selection and reading of books within his shop should develop him as a reader and thinker. Relying on his own extensive reading (he reads for twelve hours each day), Mackaye proactively shapes Alton’s reading selections. Seeing Alton absorbedly reading Byron’s poetry day after day in his shop, and disapproving of his choice of a

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>55</sup> On pastoral purity and aristocratic privilege, see Bodenheimer, *The Politics of Story in Victorian Social Fiction*; on free will and determinism in *Alton Locke*, see Gallagher, *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form, 1832-1867*, 94; on incompatible narrative forms, see Salmon, “The Unaccredited Hero: *Alton Locke*, Thomas Carlyle, and the Formation of the Working-Class Intellectual,” 167-93; on other conflicts in the novel, see, respectively, Graziano, “The Death of the Working-Class Hero in *Mary Barton* and *Alton Locke*,” 135-57; Gottlieb, “Charles Kingsley, the Romantic Legacy, and the Unmaking of the Working-Class Intellectual,” 51-65; Prystash, “Rhizomatic Subjects: Thomas Carlyle, Charles Kingsley, and the Origins of Victorian Identity,” 141-69; and Menke, “Cultural Capital and the Scene of Rioting: Male Working-Class Authorship in *Alton Locke*,” 87-108.

<sup>56</sup> Gallagher, *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction*, 104.

<sup>57</sup> On the Carlylean aspects of *Alton Locke*, see Bodenheimer, Salmon, and Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780-1950*, 100-02.

corrupt aristocrat for his literary sustenance, Mackaye intervenes, telling Alton to “leave alane that vinegary, soul-destroying trash” and to read instead John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, an excellent “classic model” full of good doctrine.<sup>58</sup> He not only helps Alton find the best books to read, he educates him on how to read them. Raising a distinction similar to that raised in the trade journals between technical and more in-depth, “practical” book knowledge, Mackaye discourages Alton from pining after formal education because he believes it fosters merely the former: “tutors and pedagogues,” Mackaye argues, are merely “cramming and loading” their students “wi’ knowledge, as ye’d load a gun, to shoot it all out again, just as it went down, in a college examination, and forget about all aboot it after.”<sup>59</sup> A man would do better, he asserts, to teach himself, as he has done.

In the vein of the “scholarly” bookseller, Mackaye replaces the university with the bookshop, and the tutor with the bookseller, as the ideal educational foundation for Alton, who is more a pupil than a customer. In the words of one of the contributors to the *Publishers’ Circular*, Mackaye takes it upon himself to be a critic, to lead Alton into “the right literary paths” and to guide his “studies” and his “taste.” Reflecting Mackaye’s disinterested passion in books and learning, money does not appear to be a chief concern in his shop. Indulgent toward Alton’s thirst for reading, Mackaye allows Alton to borrow several books at a time from the shop without payment, requiring only that Alton not damage the books and not overtax himself by trying to read too much at once or too late into the night. While *Alton Locke* as a whole is invested in reforming the terrible conditions of the clothing trade, Mackaye’s shop seems to be, as did bookshops for many Victorian commentators on bookselling, almost miraculously set apart from trade—the bookshop’s cultural mission enables it to transcend, at least rhetorically, the market. The end toward which Mackaye works is to shape Alton into a true working-class poet, attentive in his writings to working-class life rather than preoccupied with the far-flung themes of aristocratic writing. Like Mordecai, who hopes Daniel Deronda will be

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<sup>58</sup> Kingsley, *Alton Locke: Tailor and Poet*, 33.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

his disciple and successor in a Zionist cause, Mackaye positions himself as a teacher and leader in a working-class cause, the stakes of his work social and cultural rather than financial.

Although Mackaye's more secular and cultural approach to social reform, and his plan for Alton to contribute to the movement by writing honest poetry, ultimately gives way to Kingsley's religious "resolution" of *Alton Locke*, Mackaye's viewpoint on education and on the use of education is largely validated by the course of the novel's events, suggesting that Kingsley validates it. Mackaye's insistence that Alton study working-class life, and on the other hand, his cautious approach to the zeal of Chartism, prove to be wise: when Alton foolishly empties his poetry of all its revolutionary content to please aristocratic patrons, and when, to compensate for this betrayal, he swings the other direction and incites an angry revolutionary mob, he earns only self-loathing and despair. The educated, thoughtful, benevolent bookseller, fortified by many years of diligent reading and powerfully placed to disseminate his knowledge to others through his profession, is one of the novel's, and Alton's, moral centers. As Bodenheimer writes, Mackaye "nurture[s Alton] without constraining him," "recognizes Alton's genius, houses and educates him, and pushes him" toward his vocation.<sup>60</sup> He appears to be the perfect bookseller.

Yet, if an important part of Mackaye's teaching is self-teaching—implying not only that he aspires to transfer knowledge to a customer but also that he aspires to facilitate that reader's autonomy—his mission fails. Although Mackaye attempts to "nurture Alton without constraining him," by giving him books to read at home and by standing aside as the adult Alton makes his life choices, the bookshop itself and Mackaye's interactions with Alton about books destabilize Alton even as they educate him. The novel offers no extended critique of Alton's experiences in the bookshop, overtly upholding Mackaye as an ideal educator, but Alton's descriptions of the shop nevertheless imply tension between bookselling and education. Mackaye arranges the bookshop (or

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<sup>60</sup> Bodenheimer, *The Politics of Story in Victorian Social Fiction*, 145.

rather, neglects to arrange the bookshop) with none of the strategies of a bookseller like Stoneham; there are no posters, no elaborate window displays, no attention to color patterns, and so forth. Alton's early descriptions of the shop emphasize the abundance and dishevelment of its books, as though underscoring the bookishness of the place and Mackaye's devotion to books, in contrast to more commercial shops. But ironically, the effect of the disorganization is the same: unable to distinguish one book from another in the jumble, Alton at first sees them only in blocks of shape and color. He describes it from a street view as "an old book shop, piled and fringed inside and out with books of every age, size, and color."<sup>61</sup> Like the classroom space between professor and student that Bourdieu describes, the profusion of books distances Alton from the source of knowledge the moment he sees it, their sheer number and collage-like image threatening to reduce them to unobtainable objects rather than readable texts.

Even though he can discern each book once he is inside the shop, his surreptitious browsing fails to give him control as a reader. "Timidly and stealthily taking out some volume whose title attracted [him]" to "snatch hastily a few pages and hasten on" before Mackaye or his domineering mother can catch him, Alton remains disoriented by the books' organization, or lack thereof. While we might expect that an inexperienced, uneducated person like Alton would be disoriented in a bookshop because of his unfamiliarity with the ideas in the books, Alton explains his bewilderment and intimidation as much through the (dis)organization of the shop itself as through his ignorance of books and culture. "Sometimes," as he states, "I was lucky enough to find the same volume several days running." While Alton is free to handle and read the books, the shop's chaos seems to give them a life of their own, so much so that he can never recall where to find them, as though they mysteriously move overnight. As a customer and a reader, Alton has to repeatedly battle the

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<sup>61</sup> Kingsley, *Alton Locke*, 31.

bookshop's impenetrability, remaining a physical, and therefore intellectual, outsider to much of what it offers even when he is inside its walls.

Mackaye's intervention theoretically corrects these early stumbles, offering Alton a way to navigate the collection. While his help orients Alton, however, Alton seems to look at Mackaye and not at the books when in the shop. The mass of books that puts distance between Alton and learning is replaced by Mackaye's mythical knowledge of and passion about his books, which keeps Alton from growing into an autonomous reader. The shop and Mackaye's living space behind it are virtually indistinguishable, both being filled with books, suggesting the porousness of the boundary between Mackaye's bookish personal life on the one hand and his bookish professional role as bookseller on the other. If the shop space and the home space merge together, both use books to obstruct a view of the outside world, creating a distinct limit around the book space and what lies beyond and positioning Mackaye squarely in the center of the book world. Describing Mackaye's study, Alton notices, "not only were the shelves which covered every inch of wall crammed with books and pamphlets," and the floor "piled with bundles of them," "the little window was blocked up with them" as well.<sup>62</sup> As he does with the shop, Alton, who has always lacked for books, finds his access to the books in the living space paradoxically obstructed by their immediacy and profusion, their appearance being for him in "the wildest confusion."

This excess highlights Mackaye's power in the shop. Alton recalls, "There was some mysterious order in them which [Mackaye] understood, and symbolized, I suppose, by the various strange and ludicrous nick-names on their tickets—for he never was at fault a moment if a customer asked for a book, though it were buried deep in the chaotic stratum." Mackaye seizes symbolic control over the bookshop by literally inventing his own language with which to label the books, suggesting both his familiarity with the texts and his sense of self-assuredness in interpreting them

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 61.

differently from conventional readings. Combined with the books' disarray, his cryptic system demonstrates his literary knowledge but also emphasizes the confused Alton's lack of knowledge, or at least creates an illusion of Alton's ignorance. Solidifying Mackaye's authority as a confident and individualistic reader, Alton comments that he has "crucified" High Tory and Benthamite books that he dislikes by hanging them on strings about his room.<sup>63</sup> The fierceness of Mackaye's critical (and political) opinions literally looms over Alton as he enters the space. Ultimately, the books in the shop say more to customers about Mackaye the bookseller than they immediately reveal about themselves.

Mackaye's recommendations for Alton's readings reflect Mackaye's mission and taste, in a way that constrains Alton from defining his own mission or developing his own tastes. Although Mackaye encourages Alton to educate himself and form his own ideas, in a sense Alton stops educating himself the moment Mackaye interrupts his reading of Byron, an author whose book he found for himself and whose writing has spoken powerfully to him. Mackaye guides Alton to what he believes are the best books, but does not fully equip him to be a good reader generally, to make judgments about books based on his internal sense of their quality and relevance. Further, the failures of Alton's self-education in the bookshop qualifies the notion that passion for books alone, in the absence of money and position, is sufficient for attaining culture and education. As another working-class character suggests to Alton at one point, Mackaye's stated aversion to formal education belies Mackaye's own situation.<sup>64</sup> While Mackaye does read constantly to educate himself, he also has a steady income as a shop owner—apparently despite his lack of interest in sales—making the possession of a degree less necessary for advancing in the world. At the same time, his owning a shop, which puts him in a higher class than a factory laborer, implies that he himself has in any case received some formal education in the past. Influenced by his class status, and by his

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 45-46.

accompanying blindness to the realities of a laborer's life and to Alton's practical needs, Mackaye obscures the value of schooling for Alton. As a result, on a later visit to Cambridge, Alton wavers in his commitment to writing political poetry when he comes under the influence of elite, educated gentlemen, who insist that his lack of systematic education has made him unfit to judge what poetry should be. He is given several books by one such scholar who instructs him to read carefully to cultivate "the art of getting information," rather than "the knack of running the eye over books, and fancying that [you] understand them, because [you] can talk about them."<sup>65</sup> Alton finds himself conflicted, unsure whether Mackaye has led him aright. Although Mackaye believes his own self-directed reading, and his refusal to value aristocratic writing, imbues him with more integrity than scholarly gentlemen like those at Cambridge, the novel suggests that Alton's reading in the bookshop has left him less grounded in his opinions: too unfamiliar with the realm of culture that Mackaye has insisted he reject outright, Alton lacks the knowledge and conviction to persuasively contend against it. Where Mackaye gains coherence as a character through his philosophies from and about books, read as part of an extension of a formal education and from a position of comfort in the world, Alton remains fractured, prevented by Mackaye's influence both from truly self-educating in the bookshop and from gaining a well-rounded, less biased education.

Alton's experiences in the bookshop—always one step removed from making his own decisions, always in a slight haze of confusion—are paralleled throughout the novel, in which he continues to silence parts of himself and take on others' views to satisfy a given sponsor, be it Mackaye, Chartist zealots, aristocratic patrons, or religious figures. Though a small element of Alton's story, the contrast between the imposingly knowledgeable bookseller and the forbiddingly muddled bookshop nevertheless presages the major challenge Alton will face in his life, that of attempting to sort through everyone else's half-explained, half-concealed interpretations of events

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 158.

and ideas in order to find his own. In a sense, he continues for most of his life to be the lost browser in the disordered bookshop, forever taking up one ideology but losing sight of it the next day.

In Kingsley's novel, the tensions between the well-read bookseller as scholar and as teacher bubble up, but do not rupture. Despite the fact that Mackaye's passion reifies the bookseller's beliefs without allowing Alton to fully internalize them or form his own, Kingsley nevertheless suggests that Alton learns a great deal from Mackaye, lessons in literature that serve him later as a fledgling writer. Rutherford's *Clara Hopgood* also frames a conflict between a bookseller's passion for reading and a customer's ability to learn from the bookseller, but Rutherford brings out a different element of the cultured booksellers' dilemma, suggesting that booksellers might obstruct readers' readerly identities not by over-guidance, but more simply by refusing to guide the reading of customers deemed unworthy. Though the novel is set in the 1840s, before the intense commercialization of the later part of the century, *Clara Hopgood* was written in the 1890s, when the book trade journal articles reflect booksellers' sensitivity to the ignorance of their customers. Perhaps because it was published during a tumultuous time in the book industry, more so than *Alton Locke*, *Clara Hopgood* is concerned with the commercialization of book-buying and its effects on literary culture. On the one hand, Rutherford privileges the "cultured" bookshop I have been describing, repeatedly disparaging uninformed readers and showing esteem for knowledgeable readers, whose information and high taste enable them to participate in the book-buying experience as intellectual equals with the bookseller. On the other hand, while Rutherford strives to establish high, even elitist, standards for the book culture in which he participates as an author, the actual portrayal of the bookshop in the novel qualifies the good of "cultured" bookselling of this sort. For one, although it is unconcerned with the fact, *Clara Hopgood* shows that when the valued relationship between bookseller and customer is one between like-minded peers, in the vein of Besant's cultured bookshop, a customer's lack of knowledge about books can make him or her less likely to receive more knowledge.



Additionally, the novel is inconsistent in its framing of taste: while *Clara Hopgood* overtly argues that good literary taste is innate, within the novel even readers with high taste can be flummoxed by a disorganized bookshop, needing the bookseller to be an educator rather than merely an appreciator of books.

Rutherford praises individuals with refined judgment—for literature as well as for other things—from the beginning of the novel. The last of his six novels, *Clara Hopgood* tells the story of two well-educated but religiously non-conformist sisters, Clara and Madge, and their struggle to wend their way in a conventional society. Rutherford's valuing of people who are discriminating in their choices and self-aware about their preferences is apparent in his introduction of the sisters. For example, early in the novel Madge experiences an uncomfortable moment with her lover, Frank Palmer, when he declares that he shares her admiration of Tennyson but grounds that admiration on a superficial familiarity with the poet's work. "What do you admire?" Madge asks him, "You have hardly looked at him." Frank blithely responds, "I saw a very good review of him. I will look that review up, by the way, before I come down [to see you] again."<sup>66</sup> Recognizing in his answer the potential incompatibility both between hers and Frank's tastes and between the seriousness with which they each approach the process of forming and stating literary opinions, Madge feels a foreboding "burden [lying] upon her chest," which hints at the ultimate dissolution of their relationship. Madge's concern about Frank's flippancy reflects what Linda Hughes, in writing about *Clara Hopgood*, describes as Rutherford's penchant to privilege action based on reason, understanding, and self-reflexivity over impulse: the mark of a superior person, in Rutherford's eyes, is the ability to make a rational choice based on good information.<sup>67</sup>

The bookseller in the novel, Mr. Barnes, is notable for his possession of a discriminating taste, which makes his bookselling an art and social good rather than a business, a fact pointedly

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<sup>66</sup> Rutherford, *Clara Hopgood*, 85-86.

<sup>67</sup> Hughes, "Madge and Clara Hopgood: William Hale White's Spinozan Sisters," 57-75.

stated by the narrator. Mr. Barnes owns a secondhand bookshop in Holborn, where Clara takes work as a clerk after she and her family leave home when Madge becomes pregnant out of wedlock. As with Mackaye in *Alton Locke*, the novel uses a disorderly bookshop to draw attention to Barnes's knowledge and mastery of his books. In a passage with striking similarities to that in Kingsley's novel, Rutherford describes the overwhelming presence of books in the shop: the shop windows are "full of books, and the walls lined with them," books run down the middle of the shop, and books are stacked on the floor, "so that the place looked like a huge cubical block of them through which passages had been bored."<sup>68</sup> Despite the shop's denseness, Mr. Barnes has a seemingly impossible familiarity with his stock and is extremely well read within it. Rutherford explains that Barnes "was really a *gentleman* in the true sense of that much misused word, and not a mere *tradesman*; that is to say, he loved his business, not altogether for the money it brought him, but as an art."<sup>69</sup> Paralleled by the white necktie Barnes sports that is "clean every morning," Barnes's love of books and reading makes him literally and figuratively a bright white spot in the midst of the darkness of the shop, a site of culture for "literary people," among whom "he was known far and wide." If others evaluate him as a bookseller, he evaluates them as readers: "he never pushed his wares," and "he hated to sell them to anybody who did not know their value." Like Madge, Barnes possesses that critical ability not only to know what gives a book its value but also to spot others who do or do not know that value. His assessment of others' taste, as much as his own taste, marks him as a true gentlemanly bookseller.

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<sup>68</sup> Rutherford, *Clara Hopgood*, 165-66.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 168. Rutherford's sensitivity to the gulf between bookselling as an art and bookselling as a trade may well have been rooted in his own experiences as a lowly worker for a publishing company earlier in his life. In his 1881 autobiography, Rutherford writes of his position as a representative for a publisher, in which his main duty was to sell books to booksellers' assistants, as "loathsome" because it "brought [him] into contact with the trade." Associating the menial work of trying to make a sale with the work of a "blacksmith or a dock-labourer"—a rather unlikely, and extreme, comparison—he complains that he "suffered as a man with soft hands would suffer" if required to perform manual labor. Notably, Rutherford expresses distaste specifically for publishers' representatives' work, a sector of bookselling not only focused exclusively on selling books, but typically also on doing so in a large-scale and fast environment, where appreciation for books as works of art was apparently unnecessary to the job. See White, *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford*.

Through the experiences of Clara as well as two customers in Barnes's shop, however, Rutherford perhaps inadvertently raises the question of what it means to "*know* [a book's] value," distinguishing one's ability to appreciate books from one's basic information about a book. When Barnes's well-educated and widely read friend Baruch Cohen visits the shop to request an obscure volume, he surprises Clara—who is, incidentally, reading Carlyle's *Heroes and Hero Worship* as she sits at her desk—by his familiarity with the books in the bookshop. To his asking for "a little volume called *After Office Hours* by a man named Robinson," Clara responds that she did not know the book existed, having never seen it in the shop.<sup>70</sup> As she prepares to search for it, Cohen immediately locates the book on his own. The brief incident is indicative of Cohen's similarity to Barnes in his command of literature: both the obscurity of the volume and Cohen's ability to navigate the stock, faster even than Barnes's assistant, are marks of his superior intellect and immersion in culture, which are firmly established in the rest of the novel.

The foil customer is a lady who comes to the shop one day to purchase an expensive copy of *History of Surrey* by Manning and Bray.<sup>71</sup> Clara looks on amused as Barnes, who immediately spots a reader (or non-reader) who will not appreciate his precious Manning and Bray, tells the customer that he believes "something much cheaper will suit [her] better" and that he will look for a good substitute and let her know. Once the customer leaves, Barnes tells Clara that the customer's husband, who is a brassfounder recently made rich and now desirous of setting up a library for a newly acquired estate, cannot possibly want *History of Surrey*:

Somebody has told him that he ought to have a county history, and that Manning and Bray is the book. Manning and Bray! What he wants is a Dulwich and Denmark Hill Directory. No, no,' and he took down one of the big volumes, blew the dust off the top edges and looked at the old book-plate inside, 'you won't go there if I can help it.'

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<sup>70</sup> Rutherford, *Clara Hopgood*, 174.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 168-69.

The knowledge the lady and her husband have of Manning and Bray resembles Frank's knowledge of Tennyson—both have, in a sense, heard a review from a questionable source and trusted it. Because the lady does not have the appearance of a reader, being in the dubious class position of the *nouveau riche* and supposedly learning about the desired volume in an overly casual fashion, she fails Barnes's test of one who "knows the value" of books. Barnes makes no attempt to inform the lady about Manning and Bray; his choice implies that appreciation is inherent, and that no amount of transferring his knowledge to an innately unworthy reader, or attempting to shape that reader's taste, would inculcate appreciation. Where Alton Locke's membership in the working classes helps to make him worth educating in the logic of the industrial novel, as a character whose poor resources must be compensated for, the affluence of the *nouveau riche* woman masks for Barnes whatever potential she might have to become a better reader.

While Barnes, the narrator, and Clara appear untroubled with the lack of education occurring in the bookshop—presumably comfortable with the shop as a cultural gatekeeper without its being simultaneously an inculcator of culture for those outside the educated, literary group—Clara's own depicted relationship to the books in the shop suggests that the bookseller's failure to inform is problematic. Clara is early shown in the novel to have excellent judgment, being well educated and endowed with critical abilities in evaluating both art and people. Yet, her intuition and training are a poor match for what the bookshop demands of a reader, in terms of merely accessing the books, let alone reading and comprehending them. Clara, like Alton, sees the books as a "cubical block," the aisles around the books, rather than the books themselves, putting definition into the space and making books visible to begin with. As with Mackaye's shop, it is as though the books are so visually prominent that they are, in an odd way, difficult to perceive. Clara's perception of her work space suggests that she sees her body as being pitted *against* the books:

At the back the shop became contracted in width to about eight feet, and consequently the central shelves were not continued there, but just where they ended,

and overshadowed by them were a little desk and a stool. All round the desk more books were piled, and some maneuvering was necessary in order to sit down. This was Clara's station.<sup>72</sup>

Clara is a reader and loves books, but for as much time as she spends immersing herself in the world of books while working at the shop, she also mentally fights against the physical presence of the books and seeks to overcome the ways they obstruct her connection to the real world beyond. Always “twisting herself sideways” to “catch a glimpse of a narrow line of sky over some heavy theology which was not likely to be disturbed” near the top of the window, for example, Clara is one day thrilled “when somebody bought *Calvin Joann. Opera Omnia, 9 vol. folio, Amst. 1671*” and “she actually descried toward seven o'clock a blessed star exactly in the middle of the gap the Calvin had left.”<sup>73</sup> Here once again, Clara values the spaces between the books more than the books themselves—for her, the books' “too-muchness” lessens the worth of each individual volume. As her interaction with Baruch Cohen implies as well, Clara remains relatively unfamiliar with the books that Barnes has stocked, finding, as does Alton, that the books are to some degree unnavigable.

Unlike the *nouveau riche* customer, Clara already appreciates books and has general literary knowledge when she arrives in the shop—but unlike Cohen, her taste leaves her still unable to fully benefit from the books. Even in the presence of the generous bookseller, Clara remains somewhat of an outsider to the shop's book culture, simply because the shop itself refuses, or seems to refuse, to offer signposts for readers, and because Barnes's role is that of literary center, not literary teacher. As such, Clara might be seen as a litmus test for the extent to which a reader's supposedly inherited culture, in the absence of more direct guidance, is enough to make his or her experiences in bookshops positive, educative, and welcoming, letting alone the issue of bookshops' educative function for the less cultured. Without the effective transfer of information to “outsiders,” the bookshop serves only as a club for the already literate and a loving holding place for books, even

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 165-66.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 166.

though this reality contradicts the ostensible purpose of the bookseller to dispense knowledge, guide readers, and circulate literature. Even as it continues to uphold good taste—and seems to want to uphold good taste—the novel subtly probes the ways in which information about books makes existing “good” taste *useful* in bookshops, and (indirectly) the ways in which a lack of information may be misinterpreted as poor taste.

Where *Alton Locke* elevates the bookseller’s cultural mission and underemphasizes bookselling as a commercial venture by placing knowledge entirely in the hands of the bookseller who dispenses wisdom to others, *Clara Hopgood* does the same by framing the booksellers’ high level of knowledge as part of an association of elite readers who keep what they know relatively contained amongst themselves. In both cases, however, the customer’s literary education is hindered even as it is facilitated by the bookseller. Ouida’s *The Tower of Taddeo* (1892) brings these implicit conflicts between the passion of the bookseller and the learning of the reader into full light. In *Alton Locke* and *Clara Hopgood*, financial concerns are relatively absent from the represented bookshops; Mackaye and Barnes are unconcerned about making money, though apparently they do. By contrast, Ouida’s *The Tower of Taddeo*, a rough contemporary to *Clara Hopgood*, follows through on the threat posed to bookselling that attends only to books and not to sales, featuring a secondhand bookseller, Ser Checchi, so enamored with his books and his scholarship that he drives his bookshop to financial ruin. The novel presents a more extreme, less sympathetic version of Barnes’s inattention to customers, to some degree villainizing the bookseller: Ser Checchi’s attempt to create an elite community of readers slides into inward-looking behavior that shuts *all* others out, more forcibly highlighting the stagnation of culture within the shop and removing even the illusion of bookselling’s “pedagogic communication,” in Bourdieu’s words. Pitting *both* Ser Checchi’s negligence of money matters and his complete failure to share his knowledge effectively with customers against his obsession with books, Ouida suggests that what appears to be a disinterested

artistic pursuit may not actually be the antithesis of self-serving, crass commercialism, but the antithesis of cultural sharing, merely another form of self-service in disguise.

As do Kingsley and Rutherford, Ouida (the pen name for Maria Louise Ramé) dramatizes Ser Checchi's and his daughter Beldia's superiority to others by describing their lack of interest in making money and the disorganization of a shop that they alone can navigate. The novel, written by the ex-patriot during her long tenure in Italy, takes place in nineteenth-century Florence and centers on a bookshop housed in a medieval tower called the Tower of Taddeo. Although the shop is supposed to maintain itself by selling books, it functions more as a reading room where "customers" have access to the rare books and manuscripts that the bookseller Ser Checchi lovingly collects, "a library rather than a shop," in Beldia's words.<sup>74</sup> On the three floors of the tower that house the bookshop and the family, the narrator writes, "every yard of space was filled to overflowing with books," everywhere "storage for books, books, nothing but books."<sup>75</sup> The typical customers are those Besant describes in earlier bookshops, similar to those evoked by Rutherford as "literary people": "the clientele [was] a cultured one," composed "chiefly of aged men, grown grey in meditation, bibliophiles, antiquarians, philologists, professors of abstruse sciences, students of ecclesiastical history, lovers of what was old and obscure and difficult to procure or decipher."<sup>76</sup> But these learned people are more like Clara than Cohen in their relation to the stock, for rather than find books themselves, they depend on Beldia, who "knew as well as her father what volumes treated of this, that, or the other subject, and could find such authorities unerringly amongst the thousands of books tossed all together in a great heap, like the stones on a wayside cairn."<sup>77</sup>

The description of the "heap" of books as a "wayside cairn" suggests how the mass of books is viewed entirely differently by Beldia and by her customers, since a "cairn" could on the one

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<sup>74</sup> Ouida, *The Tower of Taddeo*, 67.

<sup>75</sup> Ouida, *The Tower of Taddeo*, Vol. 1, 5-6.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 37-38.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 37-38.

hand signify a landmark to help travellers find their way and on the other, a memorial of something buried, hidden, and unreachable, or even a random pile of stones, offering the viewer no guidance. Beldia's ability to see significance in the books' apparently haphazard arrangement gives her, in the eyes of the customers, a second sight that they do not possess and therefore a higher level of control and power over the books and the reading experiences that occur in the shop. The novel reinforces, again in a manner similar to *Clara Hopgood*, the refined judgment and taste of Beldia and her father, even in contrast to their educated customers. The narrator praises Beldia, for example, for appreciating the beauty of the medieval tower and seeing in it "eloquent and undying life," where others see only "dark walls, narrow ways, dumb stones, closed portals."<sup>78</sup> Ser Checchi, whose preeminence and distance from customers is heightened by his own recondite scholarly projects, is likewise shown to have genuine insight into the value of things, especially where others see little value. Taking Barnes's particularity about customers to another level, Ser Checchi feels that no one is worthy to buy a book: "To see any work go away in the hands of a stranger was always painful to him," selling a book feeling to him like "selling a child in bondage."<sup>79</sup> "Only nominally a librarian and a bookseller," he has "the true scholar's eyes, luminous and benign and dreamy," appealing to others by his apparently "gentle blood" and "vast learning," yet existing in another world from them.<sup>80</sup>

By contrast, Ouida draws out the perceived crassness of ignorant bookshop customers through the words of a woman who works in a nearby bakery and, like the *nouveau riche* customer in *Clara Hopgood*, has been rebuffed by the bookseller for her poor taste. To an inquirer about the bookshop, the woman describes its stock as "old musty, fusty, mouldy, mildewed, worm-eaten

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 8, 33-35.



things which nobody in their sense would ever use to wrap up a pat of butter.”<sup>81</sup> She scornfully recalls asking Ser Checchi for Sesto Astrologer’s Calendar, which he did not have because, as he told her, “he did not keep such silly rubbish in his place.” The woman contrasts Ser Checchi’s shop, with its rooms full of “flotsam and jetsam,” with those in a popular shopping locale nearby, a Stoneham-like business where books are kept behind “glass and gilding,” bound “in red and blue and yellow,” enticing customers to make purchases. Her perspective emphasizes the average customer’s values—the visual appeal of books, their accessibility to everyone, even their practical uses (brought out by her facetious comments that Ser Checchi’s books couldn’t be used to “wrap up a pat of butter”)—and Ser Checchi’s complete dismissal of them. Ouida seems to side against the woman, even as the woman critiques Ser Checchi: revealing her attention to mainly the superficial elements of books in her selection processes, the novel implicitly criticizes her by comparison with Beldia’s ability to see the “eloquent and undying life” in old musty things.

Ouida’s elegiac portrayal of the shop and her sympathy with Ser Checchi’s impatience in business matters perhaps reflect not only the nostalgia of the 1890s for another kind of bookselling, but also Ouida’s own position as a popular yet artistic author. Ouida struggled throughout her career in a liminal space between high culture and commerce. Her novels enjoyed a wide audience and brought her a large income, which she relied on to support herself and her family, and through her sensational plots, her depictions of opulent aristocratic life, and her sentimentality, she became, in Talia Schaffer’s words, “irretrievably associated” with the worst in popular fiction.<sup>82</sup> In her scathing review of the state of modern fiction, Margaret Oliphant includes Ouida as a prime example, asserting that she produces “very fine and very nasty books,” with prose that is “gorgeous,”

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 58-60.

<sup>82</sup> Schaffer, *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes: Literary Culture in Late Victorian England*, 122-23. Ouida may also be associated with the vulgar or popular because of her love for riches and commodities, which she lavishly described in her novels, a tendency that conflicted with her stated abhorrence of materialism (see Schroeder and Holt, *Ouida the Phenomenon: Evolving Social, Political, and Gender Concerns in Her Fiction*, 12).

“luscious,” and “disgusting.”<sup>83</sup> However, as Jane Jordan and Andrew King explain, while Ouida never rejected the financial benefits of authorship, she also considered herself to be above the literary market, a genius helping to improve society.<sup>84</sup> In many respects, her sense of her writing as a cut above the popular was justified: she was esteemed by well-known high literary and cultural figures such as Lord Tennyson, John Ruskin, and Oscar Wilde; she was deeply, if idiosyncratically, engaged in the political and social questions of the time; and, as Schaffer has demonstrated, her writing was an important stylistic precursor to and model for the aesthetes.<sup>85</sup> The secondhand bookshop in *The Tower of Taddeo* can be read as emblematic of Ouida’s aspiration to be more than a “glass and gilding” spectacle of a writer, as well as her longing for the literal landscape of medieval Florence and the figurative landscape of the cultured mind that the bookshop tower represents.<sup>86</sup>

And yet, Ouida’s practical, modern side seems to pull against her wistfulness for high culture in bookselling, the novel’s plot trajectory infusing ambivalence and even condemnation into Ser Checchi’s behavior as a bookseller. However much the novel justifies the elitism of Ser Checchi and his daughter by revealing their truly superior minds and taste, and however much it shows Ser Checchi to be a victim of culturally bereft times, it cannot quite embrace the traditions of learned bookselling they represent without grappling with the untenable, and even surprisingly unethical, nature of booksellers who care nothing for money and care deeply about books. Ser Checchi imagines that his shop is a community for scholars to read manuscripts and produce new knowledge,

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<sup>83</sup> Oliphant, “Novels,” *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, Sept. 1867.

<sup>84</sup> Jordan and King, *Ouida and Victorian Popular Culture*, 1-2.

<sup>85</sup> More recently, many scholars have argued that Ouida’s ambiguous status has obscured her work, which was too popular to be canonical and too politically complex, particularly in its odd twist on feminism, to be taken up by scholars at the close of the twentieth century who were invested in recovering forgotten voices. On Ouida’s attempts to create a narrative of her life and career that emphasized the literary and the aesthetic over the commercial, see King, “Ouida 1839-1908: Quantities, Aesthetics, Politics,” 13-35. On Ouida’s poor fit with both canonical writers and feminists, see Gilbert, “Ouida and the Canon: Recovering, Reconsidering, and Revisioning the Popular,” 37-51. For more on Ouida’s complicated political stances, see Hager, “Embodying Agency: Ouida’s Sensational Shaping of the British New Woman,” 235-46, and Pykett, “Opinionated Ouida,” 147-63.

<sup>86</sup> On Ouida’s conservatism, see Ambrosini, “Politicizing the Aesthetic: Ouida’s Transnational Critique of Modernity,” 165-81; Gilbert, “Ouida and the Canon,” 49-50; King, “The Sympathetic Individualist: Ouida’s Late Work and Politics,” 563-79; and Pykett, “Opinionated Ouida,” 149-55.

and to that end, he is generous with his books, allowing customers to study there without paying and regularly conversing with interested customers about his ideas. But through the perspective of Beldia, the narrator shows that the literary community in the Tower of Taddeo is a false one. Beldia sees clearly that the customers chatting with Ser Checchi are not participating in a reciprocal scholarly discussion so much as plagiarizing: “She knew how his ideas were stolen, his culture was borrowed, his library shelves were ransacked by the journalists, writers, professors, attorneys, and the like, who came to him to carry off a harvest of quotation and knowledge which they would have been incapable of gleaning for themselves.”<sup>87</sup> On the one hand well-intentioned, but on the other hand so absorbed in ideas that he fails to attend to how they circulate to and among actual people, Checchi actually in one sense damages the spread of knowledge through his lack of interest in customers and their doings, cheapening knowledge into a stolen smattering of poorly contextualized “quotations.”

Ser Checchi’s unbridled love of books leads to the dissolution of the bookshop as well as his family life. After he borrows an exorbitant amount of money to acquire a rare book, the shop becomes bankrupt, its inventory sold, and the tower finally destroyed to make way for more modern construction. The plot and resolution of the novel itself bring to the fore the economics of bookselling in the modern age: while Ouida is sympathetic in her portrayal of Ser Checchi, she indicates again through Beldia’s more practical eye that those who fail to respond to the present circumstances and attend to money are still responsible for the consequences of that choice, however difficult. If the customer who desires only pretty books is dismissed as vulgar, Ser Checchi’s desire to own and not sell books is ultimately dismissed as unethical. Further, the apparent cultural mission of the bookshop to preserve and circulate the best of works and ideas is undermined not only by Ser Checchi’s blindness to his customers’ plagiarism and refusal to serve the unlearned, but also by his overwhelming desire to have books for himself; his pursuit of expensive

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<sup>87</sup> Ouida, *The Tower of Taddeo*, Vol. 1, 124.

books collapses his business and makes it impossible for him to fulfill the role of informative bookseller, should he have chosen to embody it. His refusal to forgo or disassociate himself from books even for his family amplifies the dangers of his obsession. Although he has a keen eye for the value of books, as the narrator notes, he is remarkably insensitive to the intellect, capability, and rich inner life of Beldia, whom he takes for granted as a kind of darling servant in his home. Exchanging human insight and love for loftier literary love, Ser Checchi even declines to sell any of his valuable books to save Beldia from poverty and grant her a dowry sufficient for a marriage she desires.<sup>88</sup>

Where one expected narrative might frame Ser Checchi's love of books as a conflict between a cultural mission to educate and bring art into the lives of the public he serves and a personal mission to emotionally and financially support his family, *The Tower of Taddeo* puts both of these purposes together in conflict with Ser Checchi's obsession with books. Taken to extremes, his intimacy with his books makes him irresponsible as a "trade" bookseller, as a cultured bookseller, and even as a human being. The ivory tower (literally) collapses as a result of book-love, not despite it, because it is improperly motivated and channeled away from others. The "dominant" culture Bourdieu suggests elite figures seek to protect as a source of group power shrinks in Ouida's novel into one dysfunctional individual, removing even the possibility of disseminating culture as the cultured community itself becomes nonexistent. At a time when popular and high literature were beginning to diverge, Ouida's critique of Ser Checchi's extremism seems to imply that for the cultured but impoverished literary individual (like herself), straddling the line between commerce and art was the only viable, responsible option.

Ouida indicates how booksellers' concentration on their own books can become a form of cultural capital that serves only the possessor, in that way resembling the work of more commercially motivated booksellers. Arnold Bennett's *Riceman Steps* (1923), a post-Victorian novel, brings this

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<sup>88</sup> Ouida, *The Tower of Taddeo*, vol. 2, 43.

similarity full circle, framing the trope of the cultured bookseller as a literal means of making sales. Differently motivated as the bookseller of *Riceyman Steps* is from Ser Checchi, Bennett's novel is in one sense a natural extension of Ouida's, showing that booksellers' claims of being outside of the market and of being exclusive to certain kinds of customers have become by the early twentieth century so romantic, so impractical, so appealingly mystic even, that they can be perfectly packaged *for* the market. If it critiques the commercialization of bookselling, then, *Riceyman Steps* more sharply critiques bookselling techniques that attempt to hide their commercial nature.

A slightly undiscerning reader might be well into *Riceyman Steps* before realizing that its protagonist secondhand bookseller, Henry Earlforward, is not an earnest, well-informed, book-loving reader like Mackaye, Barnes, or Ser Checchi. Bennett incorporates into his description of Earlforward and his business many of the features of the "cultured bookshop" we have already seen. First, Earlforward's bookshop stands out from its popular-culture surroundings, implying a certain standard of customer. We first meet Earlforward as he stands looking over Riceyman Square and longing to share with Violet Arb, a woman he would like to court, "his own vision of the wonderful Clerkenwell in which he lived," as it once was "a murmuring green land of medicinal springs, wells, streams with mills on their banks, nunneries, aristocrats, and holy clerks who presented mystery-plays."<sup>89</sup> Matching the variance between Earlforward's internal vision of the square and reality, his shop seems "strangely, even fatally, out of place" in its "dingy and sordid neighbourhood" of Clerkenwell, "where the immense majority of the population read nothing but sporting prognostications and results, and, on Sunday mornings, accounts of bloody crimes and juicy sexual irregularities."<sup>90</sup> Rather than making it irrelevant, the apparent "fatality" of the shop's incongruity with its surroundings defines it as a niche shop for book collectors, who hope to find great treasures there precisely because it, and the square behind it, look as though they belong to a world apart from

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<sup>89</sup> Bennett, *Riceyman Steps*, 3.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

the vulgar, modern inhabitants of the era. As does Ouida, Bennett associates his fictional bookshop with a romanticized past in order to illustrate its appeal.

Second, Bennett further juxtaposes the coarsely commercial book trade with more refined bookselling through his descriptions of the inside of the shop, which is bifurcated into a new and an old side, each with a window. The window facing King's Cross Road, which Earlforward calls the "modern side" of the shop, displays "cheap editions of popular modern novels."<sup>91</sup> The other side houses old and rare books, appealing to bibliomaniacs and collectors. Earlforward's methods of helping customers to select books from one side or the other reflect two different levels of knowledge and esteem for books, as though the bookseller is (for business purposes) at once the merely "technical" bookseller who knows the basic elements of books tested by the bookseller assistant exam—authors, subjects, prices—and (manifesting his true passion) the bookseller with "practical" familiarity with books, knowing "their insides," in Eliot's terms.

When a customer comes to ask for a cookbook, for example, Earlforward walks to the shelf on the modern side where he thinks a cookbook would be located, skims the titles, and picks out *Snacks and Tit-bits*, which looks to him as though it will suit the customers' needs, though he does not appear to have read it before himself.<sup>92</sup> While Earlforward's familiarity with the books and his ability to navigate his shop help the customer to access the book, his expertise stops short of knowing individual books; he sees the modern books as types that are largely exchangeable. He hands out *Snacks and Tit-bits* in the same way, as Hawthorne suggests, a clerk might "measure out ribbon or calico." By contrast, when another customer visits the shop and asks for a volume of Shakespeare, Earlforward demonstrates the prowess of the most cultured and knowledgeable bookseller, his expertise not only helping him to make a sale but also highlighting his authority in relation to the customer. Sizing up the customer "as one who might know something of the world, but who was a

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 4, 16.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 16-17.

simpleton in regard to books,” Earlforward guides him toward a selection by rattling off details about various editions from memory, but giving him no context or explanation, as though assuming the customer *should* know.<sup>93</sup> “‘Illustrated?’” asks Earlforward, and the customer replies, “‘I really haven’t thought [but] I suppose it would be nice to have pictures to look at.’” Earlforward suggests “a Boydell” and “a Dalziel,” but comments that they would be too big to hold in one’s lap; “the customer,” Bennett writes, “who was nonplussed by the names mentioned, snatched at the opportunity to decline them.” Earlforward then suggests “a nice little edition in eight volumes,” with drawings by Flaxman, and emphasizes its singularity: “You don’t often see it. Not like any other Shakespere [sic] I know of. Quite cheap too.” As in *Clara Hopgood* and *The Tower of Taddeo*, the knowledge and culture present in the bookshop are used to exclude as much as to inform the unlearned customer.

As a third recurring pattern of the “cultured” secondhand bookseller, Earlforward’s superior knowledge is reinforced by the disorder of his shop: to obtain the customer’s Shakespeare, Earlforward descends with a lit candle into the depths of the shop, where “the [shelves], as they receded into the gloomy backward of the shop, were darker and darker and untidier and untidier,” giving, in language reminiscent of Clara’s claustrophobia in Barnes’s shop, the effect “of mysterious and vast populations of books imprisoned for ever in everlasting shade, chained, deprived of air and sun and movement, hopeless, resigned, martyred.” To the customer’s suggestion that he position an electric light among the books to make them more visible, Earlforward is dismissive, indicating that he purposefully keeps the books in the dark, preserving the aura around them.<sup>94</sup>

Early parts of the novel encourage readers to see Earlforward as he is described, a lover of the past, a man of ideas and passion, the type of bookseller who would care about books. As the story progresses, however, Bennett gradually reveals that Earlforward is not a disinterested lover of

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 7.

art but a miser who carefully cultivates the façade of the passionate, knowledgeable secondhand bookseller in order to improve sales. As Neil Cartlidge has noted about *Riveyman Steps*, because the narrator is “grandiloquent” in describing Earlforward’s “passion”—in passages that seem likely to be about Violet, Clerkenwell, his books—the reader might be forgiven for mistaking the objects of his adoration.<sup>95</sup> The ease with which the reader might accept Earlforward as a cultured secondhand bookseller is telling, suggesting that the stereotype has become sufficiently established and recognizable for the trope to be repurposed to fool readers as well as customers.

As Cartlidge indicates, many of the things the narrator observes about Earlforward at the beginning of the novel, such as his longing for the Clerkenwell of the past, are ultimately disproved or reframed, Bennett shifting more responsibility to the reader to interpret Earlforward than one might expect in a presentation by a supposedly intelligent, impartial narrator.<sup>96</sup> Hints of this divergence come early—“after considerable groping and spilling of tallow,” Earlforward is unable to locate the Flaxman Shakespeare and sends the customer away with a more standard edition. Bennett adds another lens through which to view that first interaction when the same customer returns several months later, having unexpectedly enjoyed the Shakespeare (notably, the Shakespeare edition that Earlforward did not particularly recommend but chose as a last resort) and requesting another edition. In the course of their conversation, it turns out that all of the details Earlforward so confidently conjured about the Flaxman edition were wrong. There are fifteen rather than eight volumes; the illustrations are from the Boydell edition, not the Flaxman edition. Bennett similarly brings out Earlforward’s shallow knowledge of his books when Earlforward donates a copy of Gray for a charity: “‘This is the Glasgow edition,’ he notes as he hands it over, ‘and I can’t remember now whether it or the London edition was the first—the first collected edition, I mean.’” Earlforward brushes off the mix-ups (“easy to make a mistake of that kind”), but in comparison to a bookseller

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<sup>95</sup> Cartlidge, “‘The only really objective novel ever written?’ Arnold Bennett’s *Riveyman Steps*,” 119.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 118.



like Ser Checchi, the simple errors and Earlforward's response to it are striking, revealing not only a bookseller who is careless about his rare and unique books, presenting himself as fully confident in his knowledge of them but in reality nearly as confused as his customer, but also one who is unrepentant about that carelessness.

In addition to pretending to knowledge of books he does not possess, the disarray of Earlforward's shop is also a pretense. As Earlforward's new bride, Violet is appalled to find books everywhere, not only in the shop but throughout all of the living space attached to the shop, as in Mackaye's shop. In Earlforward's office, books "rose in tiers to the ceiling and they lay in mounds on the floor"; they are stacked on the stairs, making the stairs nearly impossible to climb; and they fill an upstairs bedroom so that it cannot be entered.<sup>97</sup> Believing she is doing him a favor, Violet attempts to organize the books by moving them off of the floor and onto shelves. Displeased, Earlforward declares to her that she is "ruining [his] business," telling her, "You don't understand how much of it depends on me having lots of books lying about as if they weren't anything at all."<sup>98</sup> He explains that book collectors look favorably on "a pile of books in the dark" as a sign that "there must be bargains." To an extent, as this explanation clarifies, the strategic darkness of Earlforward's shop is meant to invite customers in to browse, in contrast to the forbidding darkness of shops like Barnes's, and in contrast to the experience that the customer requesting Shakespeare actually has in Earlforward's shop early in the novel. But if it has entirely different motivations, the strategy has a similar effect to the shops of Mackaye, Barnes, and Ser Checchi, in that it allows Earlforward to appear financially uninterested in making a profit.

The real advantage Earlforward holds over his customers is not his education, his class, or his cultural knowledge, but his ability to mimic such cultural capital in order to make his shop a desirable place to make purchases. Situating Earlforward's bookshop in relation to a decades-long

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<sup>97</sup> Bennett, *Riceman Steps*, 9, 70.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

trend in fiction that grapples with the commercial elements of bookselling—and refusing, as some of the earlier novels do, to fancifully divorce bookselling from money matters—*Riceman Steps* plumbs the full depths of the potential emptiness of bookselling’s cultural “mission.” If, as Bourdieu argues, in education a system of “pedagogic communication can perpetuate itself even when the information transmitted tends toward zero,” simply by relying on status and authority symbols that are made impervious to questioning, the trappings of cultured bookselling may similarly offer the illusion of high culture, and of a flow of information from bookseller to customer, that in fact serves only the business.<sup>99</sup>

## Conclusion

As they position booksellers in the tension between making money on the one hand, and preserving good literature and pursuing their passion on the other, and again in the tension between serving as cultural gatekeepers and serving as cultural educators, these novelists illuminate the importance of booksellers’ information in the landscape of the literary market and the history of reading in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They suggest that in the hands of different booksellers, information about books is not mere information, but a means of extending or withholding an invitation to read or to become a certain type of reader, and a means of crafting the image of books, reading, and reading communities.

By analyzing the distance put between readers and books in shops where visual information about books is minimal, these novels also offer a different angle on the “spectacle” of commodities so disliked by commentators like Besant. Indirectly, by showing the effects of their absence, the fiction implies that if visual displays might amplify books’ commodity status, they might in other ways facilitate actual reading, by helping readers to learn about the available books and by allowing readers to locate the books they desire on their own. At the same time, as my next chapter will

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<sup>99</sup> Bourdieu, *Reproduction in Education*, 108-09.

discuss, some Victorians perceived curated information—by booksellers and by crafted displays, as well as by other authoritative sources—as a hindrance to readers’ ability to come to know books and to become readers. Bookshops and book collections mediated by no one and nothing, I show, were thought to enable readers to bring a completely different set of information to bear on their experiences with books, facilitating their learning and their relationship to books in ways that even the best bookseller could not.

## Chapter 3

### Victorian Readers Browsing “as if for life”

John Stuart Mill famously writes in his *Autobiography* (1873) that reading William Wordsworth’s poetry brought him relief when he was depressed. That his depression has a literary solution is apt, since his depression has a partial literary cause. Having assiduously practiced the analytical reading practices “drilled” into him by his imposing father, James Mill, having logically “dissect[ed]” every text he encountered for years, Mill becomes exhausted by a “habit of analysis” that, he says, “has a tendency to wear away the feelings.” “The state of my thoughts and feelings,” he writes of this time in his life, “made the fact of my reading Wordsworth for the first time . . . an important event in my life.” He describes how he “took up the collection of [Wordsworth’s] poems from curiosity, with no expectation of mental relief from it,” but fortuitously found “the precise thing for [his] mental wants at that particular juncture.” Mill discovers that reading the poetry allows him to feel again, to “delight” in Wordsworth’s ability to capture “states of feeling” in the presence of beauty. Raised out of his depression, Mill concludes that “the passive susceptibilities” of feeling that can be nurtured by reading poetry are a worthy complement to the “active capacities” exercised by analytical reading.<sup>1</sup>

Though Mill most overtly attributes his salvation to the feelings evoked by Wordsworth’s writing, other details in his account suggest that Wordsworth’s poetry becomes deeply meaningful to Mill not just because of its content, but also because of the situatedness of the reading experience, the “thoughts and feelings” that initially lead him to “take up” Wordsworth out of “curiosity.”

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<sup>1</sup> Mill, *Autobiography*, 19, 137, 146-49.

Perhaps inconsequential when considered on its own, this description of the casual way Mill selects Wordsworth stands out in the context of the *Autobiography* as a whole. Mill's depictions of his childhood and adolescent reading material are peppered with references to the heavy hand of his father, who "made [him] read, and give a verbal account of, many books which would not have interested [him] sufficiently to induce [him] to read them of [him]self."<sup>2</sup> Mill repeatedly emphasizes his lack of independence in selecting his reading material, noting that his father "made" him read Latin treatises, "made" him study Aristotle, "took" him "through a complete course of political economy," "put" many books "into [his] hands," and so forth, for the explicit purpose of sharpening his critical skills, (incidentally) at the expense of his feelings.<sup>3</sup> While a few of the texts that his father compels him to read—texts such as the poetry of Pope and some of Dryden, as well as the songs in Walter Scott—give him "delight" and inspire him to "sing internally, to a music of [his] own," on the whole his guided reading rarely results in delight.<sup>4</sup> When, for example, he begins to compose his own poetry for pleasure after reading the poetry his father assigns, and then loses interest in the compositions, his father "commands" him to continue anyway to keep up a healthy mental exercise.<sup>5</sup> By contrast, Mill's epiphany with Wordsworth occurs in an inverse reading situation to that typical of his early education: selecting his reading with no thought to its purpose and with no regard for an authority figure's opinion, his unpremeditated choice results in emotional catharsis, in which he finally enjoys "passive susceptibilities" of feeling while reading. The felicity of the experience forever shapes how Mill reads Wordsworth, whom, Mill explains, he "long continued to value . . . less according to his intrinsic merits, than by the measure of what he had done" for him in a moment of need.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 18, 11, 27, 16.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 10, 16.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 14-15.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 149.

An in some ways uncannily similar, though in other ways nearly entirely opposite, experience with “taking up” a book is depicted in another Victorian text, Olive Schreiner’s novel *The Story of an African Farm*, published in 1883, ten years after Mill’s *Autobiography*. Among other plotlines, the novel tells the story of Waldo, a bright, but lonely and mistreated orphan living on a farm in South Africa, who is as starved for books as Mill is for reading material that produces feeling. Thrilled one day to discover a box of his deceased father’s books tucked away in an attic loft, Waldo at first leafs through them in a frenzy, thrusting “his hand in among the books,” pulling a few out, handling the pages, “gloat[ing] over his treasure” as “a mine of [books]” suddenly “open[s] at his feet.”<sup>7</sup> “After a while,” Schreiner writes, “he began to read the titles, and now and again opened a book and read a sentence; but he was too excited to catch the meanings distinctly.” At last, for reasons Schreiner does not share with the reader, Waldo narrows in on “a dull brown volume,” which, much as Mill picks up a volume of Wordsworth from curiosity (though with more intense inquisitiveness than idle wondering), Waldo opens at random and begins to read. The book is none other than John Stuart Mill’s *Principles of Political Economy* (1848).

Mill’s treatise is nothing like poetry—it is in fact a superb example of Mill’s “analytic” writing—but Waldo has an affective response to it that echoes Mill’s response to Wordsworth. Waldo immediately identifies with Mill’s ideas and registers that identification not only intellectually, but physically and emotionally: “This was the fellow’s startled joy in the book—the thoughts were his, they belonged to him. He had never thought them before, but they were his. . . . The boy’s heavy body quivered with excitement. So he was not alone, not alone.” Fascinated, Waldo reads “down one page and . . . over to the next,” “without changing his posture by an inch; he read the next, and the next, kneeling up all the while with the book in his hand, and his lips parted.”

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<sup>7</sup> Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm*, 113-14.

Certainly Waldo's absorption in *Principles of Political Economy* is a function of the specific content of the book, which relates closely to Waldo's own life and philosophical leanings. But to conclude that Mill's ideas alone generate Waldo's response is to ignore Schreiner's extensive detailing of the means through which Waldo initially *encounters* Mill's work: if Waldo is transfixed by his sense of kinship with Mill as he reads *Principles of Political Economy*, he is first transfixed by finding and freely sifting through the books and selecting one. Schreiner implies that Waldo's unexpected, independent "meeting" with the box of books, and his presciently selecting Mill's work from among them, amplify his perception of the aptness of Mill's theories for his own needs at the moment and, as a consequence, his emotional response to the text. Despite his craving for the formal education that suffocates the adult Mill, this emotionally pivotal moment in Waldo's life is the result of a decidedly unassisted, informal, haphazard engagement with books.

At different ages, from vastly different social positions, and with radically different texts, Mill the historical figure and Waldo the fictional character share the experience of being drawn in to books that they elect to read almost at random. Neither Mill nor Schreiner explicitly addresses the connection between the isolated, half-intentional method of selecting a book and the ensuing bond that develops between reader and text. But the correlation in both texts links these scenes of reading with a broader Victorian interest in the effects of "browsing"—a form of independently "taking up" books out of "curiosity," to use Mill's terminology—on how readers experience texts, or again in Mill's rendering, on what books do for readers.

Critical histories of nineteenth-century reading, and more recent theories of reading in general, have focused on what readers read and how they read it.<sup>8</sup> Yet, many Victorians viewed

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<sup>8</sup> For instance, Richard Altick and Jonathan Rose investigate how working-class readers made choices in what to read along or against trends in reading among the cultural elite. Rosalind Crone identifies "choice" as a central emphasis of studies of working-class readers, arguing that as much as working-class readers had choices, their reading was also heavily prescribed. Beth Palmer and Adelene Buckland outline the critical preoccupation with working-class readers' ability to choose reading since Altick's work, as well as various ways that scholars have qualified Altick's argument. Historically based literary criticism from scholars like William St. Clair, Leah Price, and Priya Joshi expand studies of

reading in a longer temporal arc encompassing more than the act of reading itself, suggesting that what happens in order to get a book in a reader's hands has an effect not only on what the reader chooses to read, but also on how the chosen book is read. As the examples of J.S. Mill and Waldo attest, Victorians were particularly attentive to how the mental and physical processes involved in browsing as a method of book selection might foster readers' emotional attachment to books and facilitate absorbed, consuming reading modes—rather than detached, analytical reading modes.

Absorbed readers then, as now, were stereotyped as young or youthfully naive, and criticized as intellectually lazy or overly susceptible. Indeed, while Waldo's excitement leads him to believe that Mill's "thoughts were his, they belonged to him," Schreiner notes that still he "[does] not fully understand" what he reads without instruction or context to help him make sense of it; Mill himself assesses Wordsworth more through Wordsworth's effect on him than through his "intrinsic merits." However, I argue that works like these—in a strand of Victorian representations of browsing that includes Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1856), George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), and Robert Browning's *The Ring and the Book* (1868-69)—nevertheless offer a more generous view of absorbed reading than do its critics, and a different way of understanding it than do many of its present defenders. Victorian depictions of browsing disrupt stereotypes about who reads absorbedly, what they read, and why; they also complicate prevalent critical views of the relationship between books' status as objects to be handled and books' status as texts to be eagerly read. Most notably, these works challenge the prevalent assumption that readers must be emotionally detached from texts in order to exercise agency, showing instead how browsing can engender readers' ownership of books and their reading experiences *through* the unique kinds of emotional attachment browsing

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reading to readers beyond the working classes, offering abundant analysis of what choices various readers made and how they used books in different contexts. See Altick, *The English Common Reader*; Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*; Crone, "Attempts to (Re)shape Common Reading Habits: Bible Reading on the Nineteenth-century Convict Ship," 103; Palmer and Buckland, *A Return to the Common Reader: Print Culture and the Novel, 1850-1900*; St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*; Price, *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain*; and Joshi, *In Another Country*.



fosters. Suggesting that readers may come to possess texts and define themselves as subjects precisely because they browse and read absorbedly, these writers indicate what can be gained even when, or perhaps precisely when, “full understanding” is precluded by the circumstances of the reader’s encounter with a book.

### **Browsing “among,” browsing “upon”: Victorian browsing and modes of reading**

Browsing books was a continuation of a practice that long predated (and outlasted) the Victorian era, but browsing was also in some ways a specifically Victorian phenomenon. As an early example, in keeping with the apparently indulgent educative methods of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Walter Scott’s Edward Waverley is “permitted to roam at large” in the family library and, in a “desultory habit of reading,” to read each volume only until “it cease[s] to excite his curiosity or interest.”<sup>9</sup> It was on the cusp of the Victorian period, however, that browsing was first named as such, commentators applying the pastoral term “browsing,” which once referred more exclusively to the grazing behaviors of livestock, to readers’ unsystematic, half-intentional engagement with books. In his 1823 *Essays of Elia*, Charles Lamb first used the term to describe Cousin Bridget’s reading as being driven, like Mill’s experience with Wordsworth and Waldo’s with Mill, almost entirely by instinct: she “was tumbled early, by accident or design, into a spacious closet of good old English reading, without much selection or prohibition, and browsed at will upon that fair and wholesome pasturage.”<sup>10</sup> From this point, similar uses of “browsing,” in addition to representations of the practice, crop up frequently in the Victorian press and in literature, particularly in the later nineteenth century.

It seems natural that in Victorian England browsing would occur alongside the more guided selection methods discussed in Chapters One and Two, as readers ignored or avoided catalogues and

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<sup>9</sup> Scott, *Waverley; Or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since*, 36-38.

<sup>10</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* indicates that Lamb’s use of “browsing” here was the first time the word was used to refer to the perusal of books.

booksellers. A meticulously constructed catalogue would have little use for those who lacked the know-how to navigate it or lacked the desire to peruse it. In his 1886 report on public libraries, for example, Thomas Greenwood quotes an observer who had “found from experience, strange as it may sound, that there were many persons who did not know, until they were shown, how to find a name even in an alphabetical list,” and that “a great many persons . . . would even linger about the shelves and hunt for a book, and go away unsuccessful” rather than use the catalogue.<sup>11</sup> As this comment hints, readers might prefer a selection experience free from mediation, perhaps because the mediators intimidated them, but also perhaps because they *enjoy* “hunting” in solitude for books, despite the possibility of being overwhelmed or disoriented by a collection, as Alton Locke is in Mackaye’s shop. In fact, “Going to Mudie’s,” the same *London Society* article (referenced in Chapter One) celebrating the orderly social process of going to the library to pick up pre-selected books, also situates that book selection method alongside other, more random, methods possible in the Bloomsbury region where Mudie’s library was located. “Your path in Holborn or Oxford Street,” the author writes, “is almost lined with those bookstalls which are supposed to yield such delicious delights to spectacled bookworms and poverty-stricken children of genius.”<sup>12</sup> In its suggestion that bookstalls themselves “yield” their books to readers, the description de-emphasizes solicitous booksellers who might facilitate selection, instead foregrounding the joy of independent discovery.

The Victorians’ particular preoccupation with browsing may have resulted partly from a number of historical changes in the nineteenth century. For one, the proliferation and increasing availability of books, as well as expanding literacy, democratized the opportunities for browsing that

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<sup>11</sup> Greenwood, *Free Public Libraries*, 181. The same phenomenon, incidentally, has been observed in more recent studies of how readers engage with—or decline to engage with—catalogues, which find that even in the more modern age of information, “a large percentage of library patrons” go “straight to the shelves” to find books, skipping the catalogue altogether. See Simmons, “Studies in the Use of the Card Catalogue in a Public Library,” 324. See also Mann, *Library Research Models: A Guide to Classification, Cataloging, and Computers*, 4. Drawing on his experience as a reference librarian at the Library of Congress, Mann shares a similar impression of library patrons’ lack of confidence in formal guides to aid research and their tendency to fall back on shelf browsing, despite its inefficacy for their research questions.

<sup>12</sup> “Going to Mudie’s,” *London Society*, 1869.

had previously been available only to wealthy persons like Edward Waverley.<sup>13</sup> Reflecting this democratization, among the Victorian browsers most often discussed in the period are women and/or members of the working class, who browse books to which they have access but who have no formal education to guide their reading. Perhaps corresponding with the Victorian focus on education reform, children and young adults were also the focus of discussions about the merits of browsing. Additionally, browsing was often linked to the increasingly prominent habit of novel reading, indicating a perceived relationship between leisure reading and informal approaches to choosing reading material.

Nineteenth-century commentators seemed to feel compelled to talk about book browsing not only because it was common, but also because of the association they perceived between the selection method of browsing and modes of reading generally, and of readers' self-definition as readers. This connection is perhaps not immediately obvious to us now, because in twentieth and twenty-first century usage, "browsing" books (at least in the United States) most overtly refers almost exclusively to a process of physically sampling and selecting among and within books. Information scholar Marilyn M. Levine, for instance, describes browsing as a "purposeful-purposeless activity," a "mini-adventure into the unknown," to "find" something that meets one's needs.<sup>14</sup> Browsing in the effort to find something can certainly mean a range of things. The "half-purpose" of browsing, for example, can be more or less specific—a reader might browse a collection simply to see what's new or what looks interesting to read, or, more intentionally, to find something to fill a gap in knowledge, as a scholar does when browsing for research.<sup>15</sup> But in most contemporary renderings, "browsing" still usually signifies something like sifting through, a mode of accessing material.

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<sup>13</sup> Jonathan Rose, "Education, Literacy and the Victorian Reader," 31-32.

<sup>14</sup> Levine, "An Essay on Browsing," 35-36.

<sup>15</sup> For theories on how browsing may be defined and the range of behaviors it encompasses, see, for instance, Morse, "Search Theory and Browsing," 391-408, and Hildreth, "Online Browsing Support Capabilities," 127-31.

The nineteenth-century use of the term, by contrast, draws on the word's organic roots to reference both a way of sampling to select, or choosing a little here and a little there the way livestock selects food in scattered, irregular patterns in a geographical space, and a way of reading, understanding, or interpreting that evokes the actual act of eating, a "consuming" of a book's ideas or narrative. At times, "browsing" refers clearly to one process or the other. In an 1896 article in *The Scotsman*, for example, Andrew Seth uses the former meaning of sampling, lauding how the arrangement of books in American libraries allows a scholar to "browse among the volumes . . . and discover not only the books he is hunting for, but others—as important, perhaps, or even more so—of whose existence he was previously ignorant."<sup>16</sup> In other cases, rather than browsing "among" books, late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century browsers are often depicted as browsing *on* books, as though munching or even inhaling them, and often (but not always) described in derogatory terms. (This usage is in keeping with common metaphorical depictions of books as food and reading as eating in the nineteenth century, as well as in other eras.<sup>17</sup>) For example, a *Times* article about voracious novel readers describes them as "browsing on romance"; one *Athenaeum* review mentions "bookworms" who "browse most gratefully" on especially interesting passages of a work, while another describes readers of "lower intelligence . . . brows[ing] contentedly upon the printed page."<sup>18</sup> In this same vein, G.M. Trevelyan scornfully commented in 1901 on the "hordes" of readers who

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<sup>16</sup> Seth, "Some Notes on American Universities," *The Scotsman*, 30 Nov. 1896.

<sup>17</sup> There are abundant examples of book-as-food metaphors in the nineteenth century. See, for example, Holbrook Jackson's quotes of several figures who compare books to food or reading to eating: Carlyle calls books a "tilled field, a spiritual field; a spiritual tree"; Southey describes books as "the harvest of so many generations"; Oliver Wendell Holmes calls books the "fruits of the world's age," and so forth (qtd. in *The Anatomy of Bibliomania*, 30-33). The comparisons between eating and reading reflect in part the evolution of the term "culture." This term, as Raymond Williams outlines, had shifted by the nineteenth century from being a simple reference to tending to crops and animals to being a metaphor for human intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development and intellectual or artistic activity (*Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, 77-80). The idea of "browsing" as an organic process of accessing literature or a mode of reading draws on the idea that reading is a form of human cultivation comparable to agricultural cultivation, although, as some examples of the term's usage suggest, browsing was sometimes seen as a deficient or perverted means of cultivating the mind.

<sup>18</sup> See "Last year 455 Fresh Works of Fiction Were Published," *The Times*, 4 Jan. 1886; "Fynes Moryson's Itinerary," *The Athenaeum*, 6 June 1903; and "Essais de Psychologie Contemporaine—Etudes et Portraits. Par Paul Bouget. 2 vols. (Paris, Plon)," *The Athenaeum*, 28 Apr. 1900.

“browse with ever-increasing appetite on the thin swollen stuff that commerce has now learnt to supply for England’s spiritual and mental food.”<sup>19</sup> Still other writers use the term ambiguously, referring either to selection modes or reading modes or both. In Lamb’s use, for example, it is clear that Bridget navigates the library in an unguided, haphazard, meandering fashion associated with browsing now (“without much selection or prohibition”), but when Lamb describes Bridget “brows[ing] at will upon that fair and wholesome pasturage,” it is quite plausible, given the preposition “upon” rather than “among,” that he also uses “browsing” to indicate a mode of reading-as-consuming.

As these examples suggest, references to “browsing” to describe selection and reading could allude to a range of activities: to scholars doing research, to lay readers seeking entertainment, to students being educated. Browsing to select books might be leisurely, as in Mill’s idle “taking up”—one Victorian commentator described this kind of browsing as a “saunter” among books<sup>20</sup>—or it might be intense, as in Waldo’s feverish exploration of the books in the attic. Reflecting this variety, commentators paired the term “browsing” with references to readers “running wild” on the one hand, and to readers being “assiduous” in their sampling on the other hand, “painfully culling” gems of knowledge.<sup>21</sup> Browsing as a form of reading was likewise diverse in style. Browsing could indicate both a kind of dullness—as in supposedly stupid readers “browsing contentedly upon the page”—as well as a more benign, readerly sensibility, as in readers who “browse most gratefully.” However, whether fast or slow, stupid or smart, whether ranging through a collection of books or reading just one, the imagined browsers in these descriptions are united by an open orientation toward books. They “take up” or they “take in” books, receptive to what a collection or a book may present to them.

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<sup>19</sup> Qtd. in Brantlinger, *The Reading Lesson*, 23-24.

<sup>20</sup> “Encyclopedia Britannica,” *The Times*, 26 Sept. 1898.

<sup>21</sup> “Professor Henry Morley on the Right Use of Books,” *The Manchester Guardian*, 24 Jan. 1889; Lowell, *Among My Books*, 9-10.

These uses of “browsing” in the discourse indicate the relationship the Victorians perceived between browsing to select and browsing to read. Processes of browsing-as-sampling and browsing-as-reading are distinct and do not always coincide. Open-minded browsing could presumably lead to analytical readings, for example. Yet, the slipperiness of the term in the nineteenth century is telling, hinting that for the Victorians, browsing *among* texts to select one might well set up readers to browse *on* texts, or that both activities define the same kind of reader. Discussions of browsing in the nineteenth century frequently correlate browsing as a selection method with subsequent, consuming reading, characterized more by feelings of pleasure and interest, by a state of acceptance or of enrapture, or by a sense of direct connection than by detached analysis.

### **Absorbed reading revisited: browsing as a frame**

Its association with emotionally driven reading made browsing a polarizing topic: when Elia’s Cousin Bridget browses by instinct, she is beneficially partaking of a “fair and wholesome pasturage,” but for Waverley, browsing by instinct constitutes a “desultory habit of reading.” Browsing’s value was entangled in questions about the merits of what we now might broadly call absorbed reading, which continues to be divisive today. By broadening what counts as part of an absorbed reading experience to include the act of browsing, which frames a significant number of scenes of absorbed reading in Victorian literature, several Victorian and more recent assumptions about absorbed reading are complicated or undone.

For one, attending to how real and fictional readers often access books through browsing offers a more expansive view of who “consumes” books and what may prompt absorbed reading. As I suggested in my brief survey of the historical changes that made browsing a specifically Victorian interest, certain, sometimes intersecting demographics of readers—the young, the female, the poorly educated masses—are often the candidates for being swept away by a book, and those books are often novels. As Kate Flint illustrates in her study of Victorian women readers, Victorian

commentators on reading were particularly concerned about women reading in a state of “self-absorption” and “vulnerability to textual influence, deaf and blind to all other stimuli in [their] immediate environment.”<sup>22</sup> Especially when reading fiction, to whose “emotionally provocative material” she was thought “peculiarly susceptible,” a Victorian woman was troublingly likely to be “mentally passive and accepting of what she consumes,” emotional rather than “rational.”<sup>23</sup> Patrick Brantlinger has similarly analyzed Victorian fears about the ill effects of “consuming” modes of reading, again particularly of novels, though more broadly applied to “the masses” of readers rather than just to women.<sup>24</sup> Confirming this focus, the Victorian browsers most often discussed in the period—in terms of selection and in terms of reading, and in both positive and negative accounts of browsing—are novel-reading children, women, or members of the working class, because solitary browsing constitutes their only access to books, or because their identity is thought to make them impressionable to books that they read unsupervised.

However, the Victorian trope of browsing and associated enraptured reading also transcends these specific kinds of readers and types of books. The experience of browsing was thought to shape readers of all stripes, from John Stuart Mill to Waldo, and with all kinds of texts, from novels to poetry to *Principles of Political Economy*—or as my later readings will show, from readers like George Eliot’s desperate Maggie Tulliver to the artistic poet-speaker of Robert Browning’s *The Ring and the Book*, and with texts ranging from *The Imitation of Christ* to obscure historical documents. What is most consistent in Victorian depictions of browsers who consume books is not the reader’s identity, nor the book in question, but the intensity of the reader’s *need* to connect directly with a book and their ability to access a book without assistance—or interference—from other sources.

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<sup>22</sup> Flint, *The Woman Reader, 1837-1914*, 4.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 22, 15.

<sup>24</sup> Brantlinger, *The Reading Lesson*, 11.

Second, browsing demonstrates how readers' handling of books as objects and their absorbed reading of books can be inextricably connected and yet distinct processes. Histories of reading often emphasize one or the other, insisting either upon the connection between book and text or the differences between them. On the one hand, scholars point out how the physical forms of books and their publication histories always influence the meaning of the words within. As Andrew Piper explains of this "nexus between book and literature," "multiple and dynamic material identities . . . constitute [every] literary work," every work's meaning constructed many times over in the various editions and copies that contour its text, giving the work a literal shape—words arranged on pages and in chapters, for instance—and a paratextual apparatus.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, in her study of the relationship between books and texts in Victorian literature, Leah Price argues that attention to the relationship between book and text, and attention to reading in general, has come at the expense of attention to the thing-ness of books. To many Victorian readers, she suggests, books and texts were diametrically opposed, readers experiencing a "wedge" between books' insides and outsides. In the period, "any turn toward material media," she argues, "means a swerve away from both the text and the mind," while "to take in a text [was] to tune out its raw materials."<sup>26</sup> Speaking specifically of criticism on Victorian novels that focuses on scenes of characters' absorbed reading, Price points out that in many such scenes characters are not actually *reading* but pretending to read to evade others' attention, using books as objects rather than as texts. She accordingly examines all the ways Victorian "readers," including so-called absorbed readers, use books without reading them: "holding, turning, handling," even throwing, them.<sup>27</sup>

The scenes of browsing and absorbed reading that I examine show a differently nuanced understanding of how readers engage with books as objects and as texts. They neither collapse the

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<sup>25</sup> Piper, *Dreaming in Books*, 9.

<sup>26</sup> Price, "Reader's Block: Trollope and the Book as Prop," 64, and Price, *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain*, 5.

<sup>27</sup> Price, *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain*, 7.



distinction between books as objects and books as texts, denying the thing-ness of books in favor of their textual qualities, nor divide the two into entirely separate categories. Tracing how readers' valuation of books changes over the course of their interactions with them, these scenes of browsing and subsequent reading demonstrate that readers can see books simply as objects in *one* moment, but that very moment of thoroughly "material" engagement with a book can directly shape readers' actual, later absorbed reading of the text in specific ways. Many of the browsers I consider here do indeed initially view books in almost totally material terms as they look at them and through them—noting their size and shape and covers and so forth, sometimes even without reading a word or intending to read a word—much as Waldo handles the books in the attic extensively, and has strong responses to the books as objects, before he is even capable of reading a word. When browsers do begin to read a book that they select, however, the transition is not marked as a complete switch from body to mind, from treating a book as an object to treating a book as a text, nor is it only characterized by a reading of a text guided by the "shape" of the book, as Piper describes it. Rather, the feeling of directly seeing and handling the pure physicality of books while browsing, of identifying a book as a desirable object to pick up, promotes the feelings of passion or interest that later accompany reading. When they read absorbedly, browsers' initial experience of discovering a book's outsides—what a book looks like and feels like, or where it is positioned in a box or on a shelf in relation to other books when the reader comes upon it—shapes their later, sustained reading of the book's insides. Working together in sequence, absorbed handling and absorbed reading set up a mutually constitutive relationship between books as "only" objects and books as texts shaped by their forms.

Finally, and most significantly for my analysis, browsing suggests new ways of characterizing the openness with which absorbed readers take in books. In both the Victorian period and our own, absorption has by turns played the hero and the villain, but has been consistently characterized as a

form of passive reading. Temporally expanding what constitutes absorbed reading—to include both the selection of books through browsing and what readers do after their absorbed reading experiences—compels us to reevaluate whether being emotionally susceptible to a book is synonymous with being a passive reader.

The Victorians and their American counterparts who celebrated browsing did so in part because they prioritized the positive emotional connection that browsers, bringing a specific kind of context to their reading, could experience with books. Browsing among books is of course connective because of the way it positions the body toward books, involving many of the senses in a physically immersive process as the browser handles books. In her twentieth-century description of browsing, Levine explains that a browser attends to “not only the words, but also the texture of the paper, the material of the binding, the color of the ink, the smell of paste, and whatever else he associates with the particular materials at hand.”<sup>28</sup> As Levine describes it, in the immediacy and isolation of physical bookshelf browsing, readers draw primarily on the material and textual elements observable on and in the book as their source of information about it, rather than externally provided, often authoritative information about the book, such as what a teacher or critic might share about its historical context or critical reputation (other than what a browser might glean from external sources by examining the book’s paratext, of course).

First-hand accounts of browsing from the nineteenth century reflect this emphasis on physical absorption: the American Edna Harris, for instance, begins her 1899 analysis of the aesthetic qualities of books by emphasizing the joy of seeing and touching a multitude of books in bookstalls, glowingly writing of “browsing happily among the treasures” of knowledge “in one brown volume after another.”<sup>29</sup> Two twentieth-century browsers, Daniel Howe and Pat Meany, similarly recall how they have enjoyed browsing in bodily terms. Howe reminisces about “nos[ing]

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<sup>28</sup> Levine, “An Essay on Browsing,” 35-36.

<sup>29</sup> Harris, “New Book Covers,” 118.

about an old second-hand book store,” and rummaging through attics and closets for books, noting that he has “appreciated the advantage of having a good home library” because the children of the household can engage with books firsthand: they can “*see* the books every day and have an opportunity to get acquainted with them and to make companions of them.”<sup>30</sup> Meany likewise remembers the pleasures of physically navigating among books, moving “from stall to stall, picking methodically through all the volumes, and rubbing elbows with the old and shabby men who pore over the penny and twopenny shelves.”<sup>31</sup>

The special connections browsers were thought to establish with books went beyond physically handling them. Levine notes that browsing allows readers to bring “whatever [they] associate with the particular materials at hand” to bear on their experience of selecting books. Her words frame browsing as a process through which browsers respond to books with all of the past experiences and current predilections, needs, and desires that their bodies carry. Reflecting the uniqueness of such a meeting, in many Victorian descriptions of browsing the act of handling books as objects, even in public, eventually slides into a very private, consuming reading experience, in which the browser has a sense of total separateness from those around him or her. Notably, in this framework first treating books primarily as objects, as Leah Price suggests Victorians so often did, does not necessarily stop browsers from then reading what they take up. Consider, for example, how Charles Dickens describes Mr. Brownlow browsing and then reading at a bookstall in *Oliver Twist* (1838):

[He] had taken up a book from the stall, and . . . stood, reading away, as hard as if he were in his elbow-chair, in his own study, [seeing] not the book-stall, nor the street, nor the boys, nor, in short, anything but the book itself: which he was reading straight through: turning over the leaf when he got to the bottom of a page, beginning at the top line of the next one, and going regularly on, with the greatest interest and eagerness.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Howe, “Browsing Around Among Old Books,” 187, 194.

<sup>31</sup> Meany, “The Lure of the Bookstalls,” 486.

<sup>32</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 67.

The language Dickens uses to depict Mr. Brownlow's absorption in his book almost exactly mirrors Schreiner's language in describing Waldo's reading of Mill. The parallel is a reminder that in Victorian fiction, at least, one can become as engrossed in a book on a public street as in a private attic and that a wealthy, educated adult like Mr. Brownlow can be captivated by a book as well as an uneducated young orphan like Waldo. Readers might of course become absorbed in books that are handed to them. But Meany and Dickens distinctly frame this intensely engrossing reading as it follows unguided, unplanned selection, describing as they do the reader's preliminary acts of "picking through" and "taking up" books. In so doing, they suggest that the books are absorptive for that particular reader in that particular moment in part because of whatever physical aspects of the book made them select it, in contrast to other possible choices, and in contrast to those around them who did *not* choose that book.

This connectivity nurtured by browsing led to both productive reading choices and a productive attitude toward reading, from the point of view of some Victorian commentators. For example, in imagery that resonates both with book browsing's association with the pastoral and with Elia's description of Bridget's "wholesome" education through browsing, John Ruskin declares in *Sesame and Lilies* that for their education, young women are best "let loose in the library," like "a fawn in a field": "It knows the bad weeds twenty times better than you; and the good ones too, and will eat some bitter and prickly ones, good for it, which you had not the slightest thought would have been so."<sup>33</sup> In arguing for instinctual choices, unfettered by the domineering "you" who might otherwise dictate girls' reading, Ruskin trusts that there is some kind of logic behind the

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<sup>33</sup> Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*, 75-76. Ruskin's confidence in the female reader's instincts represents a broader Victorian belief in, as Kate Flint writes, a girl's "'natural' purity" or "some sense of innate propriety [that] will teach her what [books] to avoid" and prevent her from reading lightly, a belief that was in constant tension with educators' and moralists' fears about female susceptibility. See Flint, *The Woman Reader*, 88-89.

indescribable, highly individualized pull that female readers feel to pick up or pass over a particular book.

Other educators focus less on the quality of browsers' choices and more on the pedagogical value of browsers following their interests and becoming lifetime readers. An 1883 *Washington Post* article, for instance, suggests that when professors allow students to browse in the library they discover, like Ruskin's fawn in the field, "what they [need]" better than a professor can, and even more significantly, in becoming "interested" in a book, they will form "habits" of reading.<sup>34</sup> As literature professor Henry Morley put it in 1889, children, and really all readers, should be allowed to "browse among [books] at their own sweet will."<sup>35</sup> When readers choose books according to their available time, their "degree of culture" and the "turn of [their] individuality," rather than through an imposed "systematic selection of books," Morley suggests, they are more accepting of reading as a practice and are more intellectually stimulated. Although "interest" in books is a mild variety of the consumed reading of Mill, Waldo, or Mr. Brownlow, these positions on browsing similarly celebrate how unfettered, physical book browsing engenders in readers primarily a strong emotional feeling toward books.

On the other hand, browsing made skeptics of emotional, absorbing reading only more doubtful. Emotional responses to a book can be easily reframed as a mere failure of rational thought, an idea familiar to current scholars of reading. As Michael Warner suggests, literary scholars have long opposed "critical reading" to reading practices considered uncritical and therefore inferior, those which include the ones exhibited by readers like Mr. Brownlow: "identification, self-forgetfulness, reverie, sentimentality, enthusiasm, literalism, aversion, distraction."<sup>36</sup> Rita Felski explains traditional critical detachment as a way of "'standing back'—keeping one's distance from a

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<sup>34</sup> E.H. Hale, "Habits of Reading: How Young People May Be Interested in Good Reading," *The Washington Post*, 25 Nov. 1883.

<sup>35</sup> "Professor Henry Morley on the Right Use of Books," *The Manchester Guardian*, 24 Jan. 1889.

<sup>36</sup> Warner, "Uncritical Reading," 15.

work of art in order to place it in an explanatory frame.”<sup>37</sup> In privileging a kind of reading that is immune to being “taken in” by texts, Warner demonstrates, academia invests not only in an interpretive method but also in a method of subject-formation, favoring subjects “oriented to freedom and autonomous agency,” who are self-reflexive and rational when engaging with ideas.<sup>38</sup> As is suggested by the fears Flint and Brantlinger explicate about women, the masses, and novel reading, as well as by Amanda Anderson’s analysis of the value placed on “detachment” in the period, the Victorians were predecessors to our contemporary obsession with “critical reading.”<sup>39</sup>

The Victorians’ well-known distrust of absorbed reading has an additional layer, however. Victorian critics of absorbed reading (of novels and of literature in general) often predicate “good,” analytical reading not only on readers’ wise choice of text and seriousness of mind, but also on their *not* browsing to make selections. Where Ruskin, for example, trusts young women’s instincts to help them find good books and read them well, he prescribes the opposite method for young men: accurate reading can occur only when the male reader deliberately, consciously selects those books that have been widely recognized as “true” books and reads them with the express purpose of understanding what has been collectively valued about them. In order to transcend “the vain, the false, the treacherous” passions of instinctual reading, he asserts, male readers must put distance between themselves and the text by reading and rereading books “letter by letter,” “annihilating [their] own personality” as they attempt to access the books’ objective truths.<sup>40</sup> Ruskin’s theory of good reading depends upon male readers being pre-aware of texts’ importance to the larger culture, implying that from the very moment of selecting a “true” book, readers’ *intent* to align themselves with the authorized view of the text saves them from misreading and from becoming victims of their own emotions. Similarly arguing for intent and formal guidance in reading, the Oxford rector

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<sup>37</sup> Felski, *Uses of Literature*, 56.

<sup>38</sup> Warner, “Uncritical Reading,” 19.

<sup>39</sup> Anderson, *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment*, 3, 6-7.

<sup>40</sup> Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*, 22, 31-35.

Mark Pattison insisted in an 1877 essay on literature in the *Fortnightly Review* that in the flood of new literature published yearly, lay readers “must read by selection” that is “guided . . . by the opinion of . . . critics” who have “surveyed literature in its totality,” who through their arduous training are able to sort good from bad and to identify what is most worthwhile and why.<sup>41</sup> Only by reading through a critically informed lens can the average person fulfill the purpose of reading, which is “to sharpen individuality, and to cultivate independence of mind,” and avoid consuming literature like “images” that flow in “a continuous douche of tepid water” into their heads, leaving them “pleased but passive.”<sup>42</sup>

A similar sense that readers’ mastery of texts derives from their awareness of a book’s place in literary culture underlies many critiques of browsing. At times, their comments focus, as does Pattison, on the confluence of poor selection processes and bad reading choices, often the popular novel. Sarah Grand, for instance, observed in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1898 that “nothing could be more unwholesome than [the] degenerate browsing” that modern young people are allowed to participate in as they “wander without a guide through mazes of modern fiction, crude stuff for the most part.”<sup>43</sup> Grand’s attention to the fact that young people find this crude reading through “degenerate browsing” suggests that their unguided method of selection, in addition to the selections themselves, sets readers up to read unwholesome material in an unwholesome fashion. Like the mediocre books that “flow” to and then into Pattison’s consuming readers, Grand’s “wandering” readers have no impetus to do anything more with books than to allow them to wash over them.

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<sup>41</sup> Pattison, “Books and Critics,” 667. As Altick describes, the school system fulfilled something of the function of Pattison’s critics in structuring required reading for young readers, either from the Bible and religious tracts, or after mid-century legislation that standardized education, from excerpts of classical and other secular literature. Perhaps simply an institutionalized version of critics’ work for lay readers, pre-selecting students’ reading was an attempt to exert various kinds of control over the working-class students—to keep them from developing revolutionary ideas or immoral tendencies—as well as to ensure that middle-class students attained a certain degree of cultural literacy. See Altick, *The English Common Reader*.

<sup>42</sup> Pattison, “Books and Critics,” 673-78.

<sup>43</sup> Grand, “Marriage Questions in Fiction,” 380-81.

Other critics hone in more specifically on the abdication of control that browsing as a process entails, regardless of the browsers' age and the books they read. One commentator noted, for example, that while "brows[ing] at large over the literary common" may be "agreeable"—registering the pleasurable emotions of browsing that educators like Henry Morley accentuate—it is not very "profitable" as a mode of learning, since browsers cannot "take possession of [literature] by an orderly survey, to find that its growth and its features are not haphazard accidents, but closely connected with each other and with general laws."<sup>44</sup> Another argued that only readers who read intentionally, rather than "browsing among books," are capable of "exercising the larger power" of piecing together what they read into a coherent whole, of "standing back," in Felski's terms, to see what is before them.<sup>45</sup> These comments resonate with Scott's description of *Waverley*'s desultory reading: through his browsing, the narrator notes, he gathers "much curious, though ill-arranged and miscellaneous information" that feeds a dangerous romantic tendency.<sup>46</sup> In this line of thinking, only choosing texts based on authorized discursive or historical information, and beginning to read with a defined purpose formed by this background knowledge, bakes detachment into readers' experience from the start, empowering readers with self-control, analytical prowess, and a widened view of literature.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> "Books and Bookmen," *The Manchester Guardian*, 19 Oct. 1895.

<sup>45</sup> This quote is from the same article in which browsing is compared to sauntering.

<sup>46</sup> Scott, *Waverley*, 38.

<sup>47</sup> Certainly the relationship between discursively informed selection and subsequent modes of reading could be refigured in other ways. The informed selection that Pattison and Ruskin encourage might not lead to distanced, analytical reading—it could also engender, for example, apathetic reading, as in school children memorizing assigned texts. Even so, it is important to consider Victorian depictions of browsing alongside arguments like Pattison's and Ruskin's, because it was ideas like theirs about guided selection, detached reading, and readers' understanding that fueled many critiques of browsing that was thought to be done for pleasure, emotional connection, or idle entertainment. Further, while in practice browsing and informed selection might not always be dichotomously opposed processes—readers might actually already possess a great deal of information about the books they ultimately select through browsing, or might browse quite systematically—the strand of Victorian discourse on browsing that I consider in this chapter concentrates on situations in which the browser is indeed either uninformed by authoritative sources or deemphasizes that information in making a choice and in reading, and in which the method of choice is haphazard, the opposite of what Pattison and Ruskin describe. John Stuart Mill's selection of Wordsworth's poems is a good example of a reader who randomly picks up a book he (likely) possesses substantial knowledge of, yet whose attitude and mode of selection ignores or deemphasizes that prior knowledge. Whatever Mill already knows of Wordsworth from his extensive



But is it true, as these critiques suggest, that a reader who becomes subject to a text is no longer a subject in his or her own right, and no longer “in possession” of what he or she has read? Certainly, Victorian and more recent enthusiasts of absorbed reading—and of absorbed reading that follows browsing—have questioned the normativity of “critical” reading by outlining the many rewards of reading without detachment. As Rachel Ablow has explained, during the nineteenth century, “reading was commonly regarded at least as valuable as an affective experience as it was a way to convey information or increase understanding,” such that “Victorians did not just interpret but also ‘felt’ the texts they consumed.”<sup>48</sup> This valuable “feeling” of texts is reflected in Ruskin’s, Dickens’s, Morley’s, and others’ positive depictions of browsers’ emotional connectedness and attachment to books. It was also expressed by figures like Mill, who defends the power of receptiveness in his paired analyses of the philosophical practices of Jeremy Bentham and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, framing Coleridge’s “endeavor to see with the eyes of the believer” as a necessary complement to Bentham’s skepticism of conventional ideas.<sup>49</sup> Various virtues of consuming and feeling texts have been identified by scholars of Victorian literature as well, including emotional rather than purely intellectual knowledge of the world, an escape from daily life, fantasy fulfillment, a feeling of connection to other readers who share a similar passion for reading, a way of modulating reading habits to the rhythms of modern life, and the ability to express pent-up emotion.<sup>50</sup> But while recuperative analyses of absorbed reading defend what absorbed reading can offer that detached reading cannot, they generally frame its advantages as effects that happen *to* the readers, without fully explicating the ways in which, as Warner suggests, traditionally “uncritical” reading might be

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education seems to fade into the background in that critical moment when he takes the book up during his depression, and it is as though he is discovering the poetry for the first time.

<sup>48</sup> Ablow, *The Feeling of Reading: Affective Experience and Victorian Literature*, 2-4.

<sup>49</sup> For Mill’s essays, see Mill, “Bentham” and “Coleridge” in *John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham: Utilitarianism and Other Essays*, 132-226.

<sup>50</sup> For examples of the “recuperation” of the value of all-consuming reading modes, see Felski, *Uses of Literature*, 58; Dames, *The Physiology of the Novel: Reading, Neural Science, and the Form of Victorian Fiction*, 36-68; and Flint, *The Woman Reader*, 32-34.

subject-building—reflective, deliberate, reasoned, coherent—in its own way.<sup>51</sup> In showing the mental processes of readers' selection of books, I suggest, tropes of browsing in Victorian literature contribute significantly to both Victorian and contemporary understandings of how absorbed reading can be a self-defining choice.

Examining the Victorian trope of “love at first sight,” Christopher Matthews shows that the ability to fall instantly in love was part of a process of self-fashioning for male, heterosexual men, whose sexuality was not only a “biological impulse” or custom, but also “a stance, a way of being and self-styling as well as of producing narrative.”<sup>52</sup> Although the notion of love at first sight was criticized by some Victorians, who doubted whether another’s character could be known by instinct alone, Matthews argues that acting on instinctual knowledge was also valorized as a “performed vulnerability,” a moral act of recognizing another’s goodness that reflects positively on the man in love.<sup>53</sup> In this sense, “love at first sight” has a corollary in some literary representations of Victorian browsing, in which readers falling for *books* at first sight become subject to “passive susceptibilities” of feeling, in Mill’s words, that paradoxically make them agents of their own reading experiences.

In these instances, absorbed readers, drawing on the context of their unguided, individual discovery of a book to make their reading meaningful, stake a clear, conscious *claim* on the experience of being carried away, emphatically, self-reflexively “owning” not only the books they browse for but also their entire experience of being taken in by them. Ownership may take a variety of forms: legal or literal ownership of a book, an emotional closeness with a book that a reader

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<sup>51</sup> Warner, “Uncritical Reading,” 16. For Dames, novels work on readers’ minds and bodies to make them into passive modern machines; Felski embraces the accusation that “enraptured” reading is passive, arguing that “one reason people turn to works of art is to be taken out of themselves, to be pulled into an altered state of consciousness” (*Uses of Literature*, 76). In her discussion of New Woman fiction, Flint suggests that the novels counter the culture by stressing women’s rationality in contrast to their passive reading; although she indicates that New Women fiction, rather than she herself, characterizes “consuming” reading as passive, she lets the characterization stand (15). Insofar as these analyses of absorbed reading do note the agency of the readers—such as Felski noting that readers “turn to works of art” on purpose to experience transformation—they tend not to explicate that “turn” as a deliberate, self-reflexive action.

<sup>52</sup> Matthews, “Love at First Sight: The Velocity of Victorian Heterosexuality,” 426-27.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 438.

views as exclusive, a reader's sense of being uniquely able to discern the meaning in a book or uniquely able to render it for others, or a reader's belief that a text resonates powerfully with, and was even prepared for, his or her own life, for example. Whatever the variation, when browsers "own" a book, as I use the term in this chapter, they are both empowered to change their lives in some way based on their absorbing experience with a text and, in reflecting on their browsing process, empowered in their view of themselves as readers. They come to "possess" texts by creating a narrative around the ways that texts possess them.<sup>54</sup> Possession evolves differently in these representations, however, depending on the nature of the meeting between books and browser, which may follow the pattern of what I call "serial browsing" or, conversely, "serendipitous browsing." These contrasting kinds of "fit" also explore the limits of readerly mastery of books that is founded on feeling, suggesting how one kind of ownership over a text may preclude another.

#### **"Without considering whether they were fit": serial browsing and receptive reading**

Voracious, wide-ranging, perpetual reading is a familiar feature in narratives of Victorian "self-made" readers—and of self-made readers-turned-writers. These young readers feast on books to satisfy a need for education, for stimulation, for entertainment, or any other of a number of needs. Self-made readers seem to feel all the more fond of their books because of the solitary, and sometimes illicit, nature of their reading. Whether by necessity or by choice, reading widely but reading alone allows readers to develop individualized relationships with books and, beyond mere identification, to take pride in their process of becoming readers, reading books without help being itself an assertion of intellectual independence that guided readers like Pattison's cannot claim. In many cases, independent reading serves as a foundation for later writing.

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<sup>54</sup> In his discussion of books in the Romantic period, Piper uses a similar formulation to describe readers' desire to possess books literally by purchasing them and readers' "sense of being possessed by them as well," meaning that readers felt inevitably affected and shaped as subjects by books and by the emerging book culture they lived in (*Dreaming in Books*, 3). As I will discuss, browsers who come to feel "possessed by" books in their absorbing reading of them develop a sense of possession over books that is not limited to their literal ownership of them, but is more a result of how they select the books they read.

Dickens's *David Copperfield*, for example, describes his absorbing, private childhood reading explicitly as an emotional safe haven from the terrors of his wicked stepfather, but also implicitly, given his destiny to become a writer, as the first kindling of his literary interests. Although he indicates that the collection of his father's books that he discovers is "small," David also takes pains to indicate its relative extensiveness for a young boy starved for any reading material besides the tedious lessons enforced by his stepfather.<sup>55</sup> He remembers a number of fictional characters, "a glorious host," that emerged from his father's books to "keep [him] company, including "Roderick Random, Peregrine Pickle, Humphrey Clinker, Tom Jones, The Vicar of Wakefield, Don Quixote, Gil Blas, and Robinson Crusoe." "Reading as if for life," David inhales the books with "greedy relish," imagining himself as the characters within them and imagining the characters surrounding him at home. David's unfiltered, indiscriminate absorption of many books is the first literary act he performs that moves him toward an independent, successful writing career.

The scholarship is largely silent about or cursory in its treatment of the specific selection methods at work in narratives like *David Copperfield* (1849-1850). Yet, in many cases self-made readers not only read widely and perpetually by themselves to develop an intellectual identity, they also *browse* widely and perpetually for the reading that they do, as writers like Ruskin and Morley advocate. Folded into narratives about reading expansively and comprehending texts on their own are narratives about intrepidly roaming book collections and making varied, mostly random selections. Beyond leading them to good reading or kindling interest in reading, as Ruskin, Morley, and others describe, this mode of browsing involves a certain sense of possession of books on the part of the browser before they even open one, in a way that casts an aura over their perception of the entire reading experience. Dickens implies that David browses as he ranges through the books without guidance or a clear purpose. Other narratives about reading in which the process of

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<sup>55</sup> Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 89.

browsing is clearly spelled out suggest that the emotions involved in browsing and selecting a range of books are distinct from those involved in actually reading them, even as both work toward the same end to produce readers' affection for books and their sense of self as readers. In this framework, the experience of serial browsing—of randomly choosing one book after another to read—prefigures and actively facilitates self-made readers' subsequent ability to absorb the good from *within* the books and to claim an unmediated, pure understanding of their contents.

The eponymous character in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's verse novel *Aurora Leigh* (1856) is a consummate example of a reader asserting control over her life through browsing books. When Aurora, oppressed by the imposed, traditionally feminine education of her aunt, which she describes as being "prick[ed] to a pattern with a pin," discovers a private stash of books once belonging to her father in her aunt's garret (details reminiscent of David Copperfield's discovery of his father's books), she breaks free of her metaphorical prison.<sup>56</sup> In Ruskinian fashion, she samples the literary fare in the attic following her instincts: "creeping in and out/ Among the giant fossils of my past, / Like some nimble mouse between the ribs / Of a mastadon, I nibbled here and there / At this or that box, pulling through the gap, / In heats of terror, haste, victorious joy, / The first book first. . . . / My books!"<sup>57</sup> She hides the books under her pillow and reads them secretly in the early morning light. Aurora's description of her browsing relates her relationship with books to a string of other descriptions in the First Book that similarly figure her self-guided childhood learning as organic, nourishing, and thrilling, in contrast to the enervating experience of reading her aunt's books "on womanhood."<sup>58</sup>

Aurora's browsing and clandestine reading are one of her first independent acts, an early assertion of her self-governing that foreshadows her liberation as an adult and her arduous journey

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<sup>56</sup> Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, 1.378-83, 1.427.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.835-43.

<sup>58</sup> At various times, Aurora refers to herself as a "bleating lamb" (1.41), "still growing like the plants from unseen roots" (1.206), and drawing "the elemental nutriment and heat / From nature, as earth feels the sun at nights" (1/474-75).

to become an economically self-sufficient, respected female poet. In critical terms, Aurora's insistent non-conformity—toward Victorian gender roles as well as toward literary conventions—and her relentless efforts to remain in control of her life are defining features of the verse novel. In general, the scholarship on *Aurora Leigh*, while it occasions some disagreement about Aurora's success, traditionally frames the verse poem on the whole as a statement about the possibilities of Victorian women writer's agency, noting how Aurora eschews both male and female gender stereotypes to develop both feminine and masculine attributes at once<sup>59</sup>; resists the financial and social security of marriage in order to pursue her writing<sup>60</sup>; uses a hybrid of novel and verse forms, and of present and past tense, to better control her narrative and to give her personal narrative epic proportions<sup>61</sup>; and simply presumes, to begin with, that a marginalized figure like herself can speak authoritatively about her culture.<sup>62</sup> Some scholars have linked Aurora's adult independence to her resistance to the formal education offered to her in her childhood, including her private reading.<sup>63</sup> Although critics have not directly connected Aurora's later actions specifically to her browsing, eliding her process of reading selection in their examination of her reading more generally, Barrett Browning's imagery frames Aurora's self-guided reading *choices* as part of an important precursor of that autonomy. Aurora's book selection process makes her, in her own eyes, an agent of her education. No longer "lying quiet" and suffering her aunt's molding, she actively chooses the materials of her learning, as she will attempt to actively choose the course of her adult life.

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<sup>59</sup> Charlesworth Gelpi, "*Aurora Leigh*: The Vocation of the Woman Poet," 35-48.

<sup>60</sup> See Case, "Gender and Narration in *Aurora Leigh*," 17-32; Houston, "Gender Construction and the *Kunstlerroman*: *David Copperfield* and *Aurora Leigh*," *Philological Quarterly*, 213-36; and Hoeckley, "Anomalous Ownership: Copyright, Coverture, and *Aurora Leigh*," 135-61.

<sup>61</sup> See Chaney, "The 'Prophet-Poet's' Book," 791-99 and Moore, "Epic and Novel: The Encyclopedic Impulse in Victorian Poetry," 396-422.

<sup>62</sup> LaPorte, "*Aurora Leigh*, A Life-Drama, and Victorian Poetic Autobiography," 829-51.

<sup>63</sup> Anne D. Wallace discusses Aurora's state of dependency under her aunt's tutelage and contrasts it with her reading and especially her solitary walks that parallel her reading, which, in allowing her to muse on poetry, symbolize Aurora's "agency and aspiration" ("Nor in Fading Silks Compose": Sewing, Walking, and Poetic Labor in *Aurora Leigh*," 336-37). Hoeckley also depicts Aurora's resistance to her aunt's education as an act of independence ("Anomalous Ownership: Copyright, Coverture, and *Aurora Leigh*," 150).

However, if Aurora's method of obtaining reading material is rebellious, in other ways Barrett Browning's depictions of Aurora's browsing and subsequent reading illustrate as much a young woman being controlled *by* books as a young woman taking control of her life *through* books. Aurora's newfound control over her education is offset by the heady exhilaration that she experiences as a browser, which, if it marks her sense of freedom, also registers her vulnerability to making poor choices. She is so excited by the books' presence that at first she nibbles not at individual books, but at "this or that box" of books, suggesting her inattention to each book's content or context: not only are texts here subsumed into their physical containers, the books, but the books themselves are also subsumed into their even larger material containers, the boxes. She proudly asserts, in fact, that she chooses books "Without considering" first "whether they were fit/ To do me good," reading "books bad and good," including "moral books," "genial books," "merry books," and "melancholy books."<sup>64</sup> Her initially physical, rather than intellectual, orientation toward the collection she browses transfers to her relationship with the individual books she chooses: she *feels* the books acting on her body, "beat[ing]/ Under [her] pillow, in the morning's dark" as she waits to read, the presumable quickening of her heartbeat from the "heats of terror, haste, [and] victorious joy" of browsing now attributed to the book itself, agency shifting from reader to book.<sup>65</sup>

Although in Leah Price's formulation readers' engagement with books as objects stays confined to the material realm, for Aurora Leigh, physically interacting with the books first as objects, in the collection as a whole and then on their own, informs how she mentally engages with and interprets texts as a reader. Reflecting the sometimes-double meaning of browsing as a "consuming" form of selecting and of reading, Aurora's descriptions of her reading are in keeping with her avid consumption of the book boxes, having all the signs of a reader "taking in"—or in other words, being taken over by—texts. Much as she indiscriminately chooses books of every kind,

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<sup>64</sup> Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, 1.701-02, 1.779-91.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.840-42.

Aurora takes an unstructured, incautious approach to each book, believing that it facilitates good reading: “when / We gloriously forget ourselves and plunge / Soul-forward, headlong, into [each] book’s profound, / Impassioned for its beauty and salt of truth – ‘Tis then we get the right good from a book.”<sup>66</sup> Far from the detached reader Pattison idealizes, “in those days” of passionate reading, Aurora remembers, “I never analyzed, / Not even myself.”<sup>67</sup> Thus, registering Aurora as a hallmark “absorbed reader,” in a chapter analyzing the figure of the Victorian woman absorbed in reading and subject to “textual influence,” Kate Flint uses Aurora’s description of her “soul-forward, headlong” reading as an epigraph.<sup>68</sup> As a reader of the books she browses for, Aurora is acted upon much in the way she is acted upon when she plays the part of a dutiful student “lying quiet” under her aunt’s tutelage, simply under the influence of a different force. Boldly conducting her own private education by browsing around the books in the attic, but surrendering to the books themselves both in her manner of actually choosing them and in her way of reading, Aurora’s control over her reading experience appears to be conflicted.

And yet, taking into account Aurora’s own reflections, her “surrender” is more accurately figured as part of a sophisticated, self-reflexive theory and practice of reading that begins with, and centers upon, her choice to browse *un*self-reflexively to find her reading material. Aurora is not merely an absorbed reader but an advocate of absorbed reading, dismissive of detachment as a source of knowledge; she argues that good reading, for understanding as well as for emotional experience, stems first from a reader’s being enveloped in her emotions and impressions. Claiming that she gains “the right good” from a book by being “impassioned for *its* beauty and salt of truth,” Aurora suggests that she must take the cue for her passion from the beauty and truth already in the text. Yet, rather than the readerly annihilation Ruskin recommends for male readers, Aurora’s

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 1.705-09.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 1.954-55.

<sup>68</sup> See Flint, *The Woman Reader*, 4 for Flint’s summary of how Victorians viewed women’s absorbed reading.



version of self-forgetting is “glorious,” paradoxically making the self more prominent: in also describing this reading as “soul-forward,” she indicates that when she reads, her “soul” is already in a sense deliberately oriented to *be* impassioned, put “forward” into the text to feel something. The reader’s soul activates books’ truth and beauty; her willingness to connect totally and purely with a book makes the book come alive.

As Aurora’s narrative of her reading process suggests, however, a reader cannot “Plunge / Soul-forward, headlong” into a book to find its “right good” after accessing the book through just any method. This is evident when, prior to her defense of “soul-forward, headlong” reading, Aurora discourses on the importance of what might be called “soul-forward” book *selection*, claiming, as I mention above, that she finds truth and beauty in books only when she begins to read them “without considering whether they were fit / To do me good,” without “calculating profits,” without “being ungenerous, even to a book.”<sup>69</sup> The wording implies that careful selection of books is antithetical to truly understanding texts, calling out what may be missed when readers informed by critics or other authorities prematurely judge books and choose not to read them, or read books with others’ readings of them in mind, thereby potentially diminishing their faith in a book’s potential. Aurora puts the method of careless selection into practice by ignoring the ways in which the cases of books she browses have in fact been put together by an authoritative source, her deceased father, and instead viewing the collection as though each volume is there randomly.

The passage identifies the openness of the serial browser’s mind and his or her relatively unmediated engagement with books as a prerequisite to productive absorbed reading: choosing to pick up any book without a purpose ensures her receptivity to whatever the book has to offer. The total context of Aurora’s reading experience suggests that Aurora’s reckless, haphazard “nibbling” among the books is less a process of being carried away than a mindful cultivation of receptiveness

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<sup>69</sup> Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, 1.701-04.

to all books, that—however uncalculating Aurora wishes to be in her reading—gives her access to “the right good from a book.” From this view, it seems especially fitting that the description of Aurora’s browsing in the attic, which begins with her noting that the books are packed in cases labeled with her father’s name, concludes with her exultant exclamation that they are “My books!”. She has been taken in by the books, but in the very process of arranging to be taken in, she also comes to access their meaning for herself, figuratively (and literally) coming to own them.<sup>70</sup>

Further, from Aurora’s perspective, browsing and absorbed reading not only enable her understanding of books, they shape how she thinks of herself as a reader and a writer, making her the owner of her reading experience in another sense. Self-guided reading is the “Sublimest danger, /over which none weeps”: dangerous because the isolated reader gets lost in “the thick / Of men’s [conflicting] opinions,” but sublime because the confusion “throws you back upon a noble trust / And use of your own instinct,” a superior method of understanding, she suggests, to traditional, formal, and masculine “school logic.”<sup>71</sup> Positioning herself to rely on only her instinct to find meaning in books, Aurora defines her own capacities through browsing and builds her trust in them, leading her to confidently declare herself a good, absorbed reader.

Placed as it is in the first book of Barrett Browning’s *Kunstlerroman*, the browsing that Aurora engages in prepares the way for her to become a poet as well as a reader. As part of her description of her browsing among her father’s collection, Aurora writes, “At last because the time

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<sup>70</sup> In her analysis of education in *Aurora Leigh*, Sheila Corder similarly examines the benefits of Aurora’s “headlong reading” (though Corder focuses more on reading modes than on selection modes) and compares and contrasts Aurora’s education with that of the working-class character Marian Erle. Corder points out that Marian is compelled by circumstance to take the individual and emotional approach to books that Aurora deliberately chooses, Marian being given, without quality instruction, “some stray odd volume” and “small gleanings” here and there, from which she fashions a meaningful relationship with books, however incomplete her understanding (3.973-80). As Corder suggests, Aurora’s and Marian’s educational paths highlight both the ways that “headlong” reading transcends class and the ways in which Aurora’s much more extensive access to books and prior instruction from her father support an informal, inquisitive approach to education better than Marian’s impoverished circumstances and uneducated parents (see “Radical Education in *Aurora Leigh*”).

<sup>71</sup> Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, 1.739, 1.801-09.

was ripe, / I chanced upon the poets.”<sup>72</sup> As with all of her reading, her reading of the poetry she “chance[s] upon” is soul-forward, though in this case, she imitates rather than merely plunges into the texts: “in a flush / Of individual life,” she explains, “I poured myself / Along the veins of others, and achieved / Mere lifeless imitations of live verse.”<sup>73</sup> While Aurora considers her early imitative poetry itself to be “lifeless,” it is the seed of the original writing she later produces, her indiscriminate reading and regurgitation serving as an intellectual playground for her maturation. In this sense, as well, Aurora owns her chance browsing experiences, as she frames her close identification with the browsed-for, chanced-upon books as the foundation and catalyst of her fledgling writing career.

As this scene suggests, Victorian depictions of instructive, insightful serial browsing and reading redefine what it looks like to master what Aurora Leigh calls the “right good” of books, rendering it as something instinctually accessed rather than logically deduced. While these scenes are as interested in readers’ “accurate” reading as Pattison or Ruskin (in his directions to male readers, at least) they imply that good reading has as much or more to do with accurately capturing what might be termed the *spirit* of literature than its literal, detailed content, a mode of reading that wide-ranging serial browsing rather than methodical selection supports, perhaps particularly usefully for aspiring writers. Consider, for example, the extensive browsing of the schoolboy Beetle in Rudyard Kipling’s short story collection *Stalky & Co.* (1899). Beetle’s headmaster notices Beetle’s aspirations to be a journalist and gives him “the run of his brown-bound, tobacco-scented library; prohibiting nothing, recommending nothing.”<sup>74</sup> Equipped with “a silver inkstand, and unlimited pens and paper,” Beetle browses and reads, like Aurora, indiscriminately. Speaking from Beetle’s perspective, in the library, Kipling writes,

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 1.843-44.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 1.971-74.

<sup>74</sup> Kipling, *Stalky & Co.*, 449.

There were scores and scores of ancient dramatists; there were Hakluyt, his voyages; French translations of Muscovite authors called Pushkin and Lermontoff; little tales of a heady and bewildering nature, interspersed with unusual songs—Peacock was that writer’s name; there was Borrow’s *Lavengro*; an odd theme, purporting to be a translation of something called a ‘Rubáiyát,’ which the Head said was a poem not yet come to its own; there were hundreds of volumes of verse—Crashaw; Dryden; Alexander Smith; L.E.L.; Lydia Sigourney; Fletcher and a purple island; Donne; Marlowe’s *Faust*; and . . . Ossian; *The Earthly Paradise*; *Atalanta in Calydon*; and Rossetti—to name only a few.<sup>75</sup>

Kipling makes no pretense that Beetle “exercises the larger power” over this collection through a systematic accounting of each book. Beetle has more books to hand than he could possibly read, as the detail of “hundreds of volumes of verse” indicates. Kipling’s wording emphasizes Beetle’s cluelessness about the books that he mostly arbitrarily picks up among others in the collection, his grasping at the scant information about the books he chooses, as he notes “authors called Pushkin and Lermontoff,” or that “Peacock was that writer’s name.” Despite the threat that the mass of books will overwhelm Beetle, Kipling raises but dismisses the possibility of the headmaster as a potential guide to offer him a rigorous, “informed” course of literary study, the headmaster deliberately “prohibiting nothing, recommending nothing.” The headmaster instead restricts his “teaching” to occasional visits to the library while Beetle is there, “drifting” in to “read here a verse and here another of these poets, opening up avenues,” and to reminisce about authors he has known. While the headmaster guides Beetle to some extent by teasing him with these tidbits, his mode of interaction with the young reader itself reinforces Beetle’s browsing method more than it actually structures his reading selection, intermittent and random as these readings and reminiscences are.

Beetle thus does not come to know the books in the manner of Ruskin’s ideal young male reader, through disciplined, careful reading and rereading, or as one of Pattison’s critically guided readers who reads to form distinct opinions. Rather, through the nature of his haphazardly browsing and consuming many of them in a state of rapture, Beetle apparently comes to know something like

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 449-50.

the essence of the books. The cadence of Kipling's long sentence—the rapid-fire listing of many books that quickens in pace as the sentence progresses—highlights, without irony or suspicion, Beetle's growing exhilaration in the books' sheer number and in being free to handle them, implying that the books, in Pattison's terminology, “flow” into him. The emotions excited by browsing the books without anyone immediately filtering or forcing the experience makes him so enamored with literature at large that he transitions apparently seamlessly from reading absorbedly and haphazardly to becoming a successful writer. The inkstand, pens, and paper that Beetle keeps handy for his reading signify that however hazy his technical understanding of books, Beetle nevertheless comes to possess them as Aurora does her father's books. As Kipling writes, Beetle's time in the library leaves him “full of . . . matters and metres, hoarded in secret” and expressed privately during his school time; out of this eclectically imitative state of his childhood literary development, which is reminiscent of Aurora's “mere lifeless imitations of live verse,” he eventually does become a journalist. Unlike Aurora Leigh, prior to his reading Beetle does not appear to be self-aware of how his indiscriminate browsing facilitates his receptiveness to books and inspires him to write, although his headmaster is quite thoughtful about designing this set-up on Beetle's behalf. The ownership involved in Beetle's browsing and absorbed reading instead emerges in Beetle's enthusiastic embracing of the independent browsing he is allowed to do and becomes most apparent in what he does with the experience, in his becoming a writer. The overall effect is the same as for Aurora: serial browsing cultivates a receptivity to books that enables a unique relationship with, and understanding of, them that can be claimed through the actions that understanding inspires.

The same kind of empowerment is indicated in other Victorian depictions of serial browsing, where unguided, receptive ranging over many books provides would-be writers with a sense of their special ability to relate to books, penetrate their meaning, or repurpose them for their own writing. For example, Cosima Chudleigh, the female protagonist of George Paston's novel *A Writer of Books*

(1898), finds “companionship” in books and nurtures a love of literature when she is “turned loose in [her father’s] library to browse at will.”<sup>76</sup> “Browsing” describes both Cosima’s method of selection and her absorbed approach to reading—as Paston writes, “it was only thanks to a wonderful digestion that she did not fall a victim to mental dyspepsia.” Cosima’s browsing and “digestion” of books in childhood preface her future career as a novelist, as well as Cosima’s adult life in London, in which Cosima accrues life experiences for her writing, one could say, by “browsing” what the city has to offer her, fairly indiscriminately mingling with people a proper young woman might not typically associate with. Here, serial book browsing is not only empowering as a framework for reading and an inspiration for writing based on reading, it is part of an empowering mindset for an independent life.

Historical narratives of working-class self-made readers-turned-writers similarly draw on a trope of serial browsing to indicate the reader/writer’s developing sense of ownership over their experiences with texts. As Jonathan Rose asserts, Victorian readers without access to formal education educated themselves in their effort to “be active thinkers and writers,” “individual agents in framing an understanding of the world.”<sup>77</sup> Working-class autobiographies suggest that broadly browsing better enables working-class readers to claim the total experience of reading as one of their own making. The poet Gerald Massey (1828-1907), for instance, recalled that as a youth he “read, read, read!” whenever and wherever he could, browsing the bookstalls and staking out various books of interest, although like the experience of the browsing Alton Locke (described in Chapter Two), he was sometimes a victim of changes in the collection: “I . . . often fold[ed] a leaf in a book,” he remembered, “and return[ed] the next day to continue the subject; but sometimes the book was gone, and then great was my grief!”<sup>78</sup> In his *Memoirs of a Working Man* (1845) Thomas Carter similarly

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<sup>76</sup> Paston, *A Writer of Books*, 6.

<sup>77</sup> Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, 57, 12.

<sup>78</sup> From Samuel Smiles, ed., *Poetical Works*, xii.

recalls that when “standing at a bookstall” he “read with the most advantage” as he gathered “scraps of useful information” from various books.<sup>79</sup> In describing their selection of books, Massey and Carter notably underemphasize the specific contents of the books they choose. The physical mechanics of serial browsing—the act of selecting and secretly marking books to come back to, or of choosing to read from this book or that while standing at a bookstall—are at the forefront, their actual reading fading into a larger experience of repeatedly taking up books. As their nostalgic, proud tone in recalling the specific ways they obtained the books suggests, browsing provides them with a sense of personal connection to their chosen books as *their choices*. But they frame those selections as choices of books *en masse*, rather than of specific, cherished books, a distinction expressed by Massey’s memory of grieving over the numerous, unnamed books that were taken after he marked them his. The mode of reading that results from this browsing is not necessarily detached or analytical: Carter, for one, describes his reading as a process of eagerly stockpiling information taken at face value. But these writers do imply their strong understanding of what they read—Carter’s reading mode is one of unquestioning acceptance, but his gleanings are nevertheless “useful.” That they eventually become writers suggests a further assertion of agency building off of this experience, as obtaining masses of books without guidance seems from their viewpoint a major part of their education in becoming, in Rose’s terms, “individual agents in framing an understanding of the world.”

**“I fused my soul and that inert stuff”: serendipitous browsing and self-absorbed reading**

In scenes of serial browsing, a relationship develops between browsers and books, plural: Aurora’s “My books!”, Beetle’s “hundreds of volumes of verse.” The experiences of Aurora, Beetle, Cosima, and other serial browsers represent a mode of being and of growing, a long-term orientation toward books that facilitates development and helps readers to come into their own. The

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<sup>79</sup> Carter, *Memoirs of a Working Man*, 131.

browsing experience of figures like Mill and Waldo take a different form: a relationship with one special book develops when a general attitude of receptivity hardens into a clear “recognition” of a book apparently meant just for them. Mill’s thoughts in *Principles of Political Economy* seem to “belong” to Waldo and await his discovery; Mill values Wordsworth as a poet less because of “intrinsic merits” than because of what his words do for Mill at a crucial moment. In this alternative version of the trope of browsing, readerly ownership is defined by browsers’ ability to discern and act upon very particular signs of fate, Providence, or even mere felicity that are encoded in the encounter with a chanced-upon book, to determine the books’ meaning and absorb its message primarily through the immediate, personal circumstances of their discovery.<sup>80</sup>

Aurora’s “chancing” upon poetry among her father’s books at just the right time in her intellectual development, in contrast to the less defined and individually notable instances of reading that emerge from her browsing generally, is an example of this kind of serendipitous browsing. Suggesting that her encounter with poetry occurs “because the time was ripe”—attributing the cause to apparently unknown universal forces that are “in the know”—Aurora implies that this browsing experience is meaningful both because it is pre-arranged and because she must recognize and claim those signs in order to transform herself from a reader of poetry into a writer of poetry.

As I have suggested, Waldo’s encounter with *Principles of Political Economy* not only illustrates the half-fated and half-self-created relationship a browser can feel with a single book, it also draws out the solipsism and only partial understanding inherent in reading without a guide. The books, and then specifically Mill’s book, come to Waldo unbidden, and yet Mill’s work is recognized and claimed by him. The “mine” of books “open at his feet” as “his treasure”; when he chooses Mill’s book, he does so confidently but with no conscious reason, seeming to instinctually recognize

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<sup>80</sup> Reflecting this same sense of the meeting of book and reader as a combination of chance and action on the reader’s part, scholar Maurice B. Line defines serendipity in browsing as “accidental happy discovery” that “can occur at any time and in any place,” requiring only “a prepared mind.” See Line, “Accessing and Browsing Information and Communication,” 173-74.



something that has been prepared for him. Nevertheless, if Waldo's serendipitous discovery of the book reinforces his sense that Mill's "thoughts were his," his perceived ownership over the book does not ensure his mastery of it, for he "[does] not fully understand" what he reads. Indicating that without discursive context, a teacher, or rereading, Waldo cannot entirely grasp Mill's ideas, Schreiner implies, perhaps paradoxically, that Waldo believes he physically, emotionally, and intellectually "owns" a book that he *knows* he does not fully comprehend. The scene articulates the possibility that browsers could claim a transformative identification with a book from absorbedly reading a discovered text, and at the same time, remain sensibly aware that this perceived connection is only the beginning of their learning from the book, which will likely complicate the initial transformation.

A similar suggestion—that browsers can productively claim ownership over a book even as, or even because, browsing limits what they know of books' more widely accepted meaning—resonates in other Victorian texts. Like Aurora Leigh and Waldo, George Eliot's Maggie Tulliver (the heroine of *The Mill on the Floss* (1860)) browses in part because she lacks the opportunity for formal education. Comparing Maggie's self-guided education with her brother Tom's more structured education, Eliot emphasizes Maggie's longing for the kind of supervised reading that Mill experienced in childhood and that Victorian advocates of guided selection declare to be essential to good reading. Without an education to help her understand texts and compare them to one another, to view them historically, or to read them in context of others' commentary, she feels unable to make sense of what she reads. Her readings of Tom's copies of Euclid and Virgil, and her ventures into "peculiarly masculine studies," leave her with little more than "futile information" and a "sinking" feeling, Eliot writes, that she "had set out towards the Promised Land" and gotten lost.<sup>81</sup> Left with whatever "shreds and patches of feeble literature and false history" she can find, and

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<sup>81</sup> George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, 287-88.

especially desperate when her access to books is further limited by her family's financial ruin, Maggie somewhat naively wishes for "that knowledge which made men contented," "some key that would enable her to understand" those "irreversible laws within and without her" and to navigate a morally fraught, lonely life.<sup>82</sup>

Yet, though during her youth Maggie laments her "shreds and patches" reading experiences and longs for authoritative guides, like Waldo her most transformative, cherished reading experience—her reading from Thomas à Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ* after her family life has fallen into social and financial shambles—occurs after she browses, alone, for and within the book. Picking up *The Imitation of Christ* from among other books with little prior knowledge of it, Maggie's initial pass through the book is indeed patchy, following "strong pen-and-ink marks, long since browned by time," made by "some hand, now for ever quiet" to denote "certain passages."<sup>83</sup> The cryptic "hand" appears to Maggie to be guiding her to passages relevant to her situation: "She went on from one brown mark to another, where the quiet hand seemed to point, hardly conscious that she was reading—seeming rather to listen."<sup>84</sup> Seeing à Kempis's philosophy of renunciation as her new pathway to happiness, Maggie absorbs everything she can from the text and immediately begins to live its philosophy in her life. As Eliot writes, though Maggie "knew nothing of doctrines or systems—of mysticism or quietism," "this voice out of the far-off middle ages was the direct communication of a human soul's belief and experience, and came to Maggie as an unquestioned message."<sup>85</sup>

Much as Waldo's reading of Mill is somewhat superficial, though, Maggie does not grasp the "inmost truth" of the text, which is, Eliot clarifies, "that renunciation remains sorrow," rather than

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 286-88.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 289.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 289-90.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 291.

eliminating sorrow.<sup>86</sup> In the remainder of the novel, in part through her eventual exhaustion with self-repression and in part through her friend Philip Wakem's prodding, Maggie is forced to question the sacredness and authority of her reading of à Kempis. Gesturing toward Maggie's state of emotional desperation in her reading of *The Imitation of Christ*, as well as the isolation in which she reads and interprets the book, critical readings of this scene in *The Mill on the Floss* often treat Maggie's use of à Kempis as a mistake, her haste and her desire to see relevance to her personal life in the text leading her to misread it.<sup>87</sup> These readings suggest that Maggie's immediate sense of identification with *The Imitation of Christ* is formed on false grounds and that her "unquestioning" belief in what she thinks are its teachings endanger rather than promote her happiness—she becomes a victim of her own impassioned, poorly informed reading.

Others have suggested that a more affirmative view is in order. They point out that from à Kempis, Maggie finds, in Eliot's words, "an effort and a hope that helped her through years of loneliness, making out a faith for herself without the aid of established authorities and appointed guides—for they were not at hand, and her need was pressing."<sup>88</sup> Eliot certainly draws out several positive results of Maggie's unquestioning readings: Maggie just before reading Thomas à Kempis is idle, miserable, and confused; Maggie just after Thomas à Kempis is overly ascetic, but is also industrious, purposeful, and at least temporarily, relatively content. Whereas before she alternates between staring "blankly" out the window instead of reading, day-dreaming about running away, and feeling so angry toward her family that she believed "it was not difficult for her to become a demon," afterward she rereads à Kempis and a few other texts "eagerly and constantly," sews diligently to

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 291.

<sup>87</sup> See Alley, "The Complete and Incomplete Educations of *The Mill on the Floss*," 193, and Kreisel, "Superfluity and Suction: The Problem with Saving in *The Mill on the Floss*," 91, 99.

<sup>88</sup> George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, 292; Hagan, "A Reinterpretation of *The Mill on the Floss*," 53; and Birch, introduction to *The Mill on the Floss*, xv. Hagan's view of Eliot's positive rendering of Maggie's reading builds off of readings by Bernard J. Paris, Reva Stump, and George Levine.

stay occupied, and brings peace to her troubled home.<sup>89</sup> As Waldo's partial comprehension of Mill inspires him with hope for his future, Maggie's partial understanding of à Kempis emboldens her to take some positive actions in her life.

While analyses of this reading experience as constructive most often emphasize how the content of *The Imitation of Christ* helps Maggie to act, Eliot's careful attention to the particular way in which Maggie encounters *The Imitation of Christ* suggests that she is not only sympathetic to Maggie's wish to renounce her desires, she is also sympathetic to the *process* through which Maggie accesses the book that gives her a new energy for life. The ways that Maggie takes ownership over her experience with the book—rather than merely being a victim of excessive emotion—come into better focus when her browsing for *The Imitation of Christ* is considered as a frame that structures her absorbed reading within the book.<sup>90</sup> The details Eliot provides about Maggie's browsing for *The Imitation of Christ* highlight, as does Schreiner, how the serendipitous discovery of a book through a browser's active "recognition" empowers browsers to feel ownership over what they read.

Maggie gets her hands on the book through a repeated sequence of browsing. When her friend Bob Jakin, an illiterate packman in the business of buying and selling odds-and-ends, finds a set of books while looking over a book-stall, he decides to buy them because "they're cram-full o'print, an' [he] thought they'd do no harm comin' along wi' these bettermost books," the books he gives her that have pictures.<sup>91</sup> Resembling the demoralized John Stuart Mill in her idleness and

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<sup>89</sup> George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, 287, 293-94.

<sup>90</sup> In her analysis of the scene, Birch briefly points out the importance of the way Maggie acquires books: "It is significant that these books did not enter Maggie's life through her own purposeful seeking. They arrive accidentally [and] she interprets them as a spiritual extension of the self-forgetfulness to which her nature already inclines" (Introduction to George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, xv). The relationship Birch identifies between Maggie's general self-forgetfulness and the accidental nature of her access to the books that become so important to her resembles the relationship between haphazard browsing and receptive readers, which I have identified in *The Mill on the Floss* and other Victorian scenes of browsing. My purpose in analyzing Maggie's browsing is to flesh out *why* the "accidental" access to a book facilitates Maggie's ability to interpret it as an extension of her existing nature and beliefs.

<sup>91</sup> George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, 283.

weariness, Maggie leisurely begins to look over the set and eventually chooses *The Imitation of Christ* from among the others:

At last Maggie's eyes glanced down on the books that lay on the window-shelf, and she half forsook her reverie to turn over listlessly the leaves of the 'Portrait Gallery,' but she soon pushed this aside to examine the little row of books tied together with string. 'Beauties of the Spectator,' 'Rasselas,' 'Economy of Human Life,' 'Gregory's Letters'—she knew the sort of matter that was inside all these: the 'Christian Year'—that seemed to be a hymn-book, and she laid it down again; but *Thomas à Kempis*?—the name had come across her in her reading, and she felt the satisfaction, which everyone knows, of getting some ideas to attach to a name that strays solitary in the memory. She took up the little, old, clumsy book with some curiosity.<sup>92</sup>

As with the unassuming volume that Waldo picks up, Maggie's selection of "the little, old, clumsy book" is framed as a somewhat mystical meeting between book and browser, drawing attention to both the browser's sensitivity to the book and the universe's machinations to bring it forth fortuitously at a particular time and place. Although Maggie is guided to choose *The Imitation of Christ* by information about the text she has "come across" in other reading, rather than purely from instinct, Eliot indicates that Maggie's interest in the book is less prompted by a thorough prior knowledge of à Kempis than by what her basic recognition of him, "stray[ing]" in her mind, "does for her," in Mill's terms—here, by giving her personal "satisfaction" in her vague recognition of his name. And like Aurora with her father's books, Maggie disregards the book's relation to the other books in the bundle Bob "curates" for her, putting her own rather than Bob's significance on the volume.

From the moment of her picking up the book out of "curiosity"—again reminiscent of Mill—Maggie perceives it in relation primarily to herself and her life, an assertion of ownership that is paralleled by her then perceiving the marginal markings within the book as being prepared specifically for *her* reading, rather than leading her to imaginatively link the book with a broader community of readers. In her analysis of this scene as an example of a reader viewing a book as an

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 288-89.

object, Leah Price suggests that Maggie's interest in the markings is materialistic and in keeping with bibliomania, a kind of "fetishism that prizes a books for the hands through which it has passed."<sup>93</sup> She further argues that the scene shows Maggie, in her own perception, as "only one of a long line of readers," "communion" with which "can undo the covert narcissism" of her reading of *The Imitation of Christ*. While certainly Maggie's reading could fairly be termed narcissistic, Price's emphasis on the materiality of the scene underplays the precise combination of factors, material and otherwise, in the whole reading situation. Maggie's interest in the text is fueled by the interplay of elements in her selection of the book and her reading of it—her need for guidance at the time, her prompting from vaguely recognizing the author's name that she should pick up the book, and the content of the passages the markings point to, which seem to presciently speak to her need. Although Maggie notes the book's aged appearance, rather than fetishizing the book's many possible former readers, Maggie fetishizes only one, the reader who has marked out the passages relevant for her.<sup>94</sup>

Her interpretation of her discovery as serendipitous, a coming-together of many factors, is thereby empowering. Although Maggie is "hardly conscious" of her reading, "devouring eagerly the dialogues with the invisible Teacher" (Eliot's use of the term "devouring" resonating with metaphorical renderings of reading and browsing as eating), her absorbed reading is not just a

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<sup>93</sup> Price, *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain*, 169.

<sup>94</sup> Maggie's narrowing of the books' readership to herself and the one former reader who has marked the margins parallels David Copperfield's and Aurora Leigh's readings of their fathers' books. In all of these experiences, the readers seem unaware of or uninterested in a broader discursive context for the books that they read, instead viewing them in context of how they have been owned or read by a single, significant reader besides themselves, whom they see only in relation to themselves. These tiny communities of two readers can be contrasted with the more expansive imagined reading communities Price suggests are at work in the scene. Flint similarly describes a broader reading community against which Maggie's and others might be contrasted, describing women readers (plural) with whom a single reader "shares horizons of expectations which have to a significant extent been built up through their common reading material" (*The Woman Reader*, 42). Although the reader in Flint's scenario privately imagines herself as part of that community of readers, in her imagination she is still joining a larger public, whereas readers like Maggie "converse" with or imagine the single other reader in a way that is always meant to be kept private from all others, maintaining a more isolated experience with the text.

passive surrender.<sup>95</sup> Rather, Maggie's eager acceptance of the book's message is generated by her sense that the book is *hers* to claim, and is therefore an active response to a perceived sign of destiny that leads her to take further, productive action in her life. Her connection to *The Imitation of Christ* gives her license to read the text through the lens of her life and needs: freed from a perceived obligation to fit her reading into the traditionally "masculine" forms she tries to pursue in childhood, Maggie makes use of the reading she browses for herself in a way that reading Tom's textbooks never enables. Observing that Maggie is strengthened by having to "mak[e] out a faith *for herself*," notably without "established authorities and appointed guides," Eliot suggests that browsing has enabled Maggie to become her own guide.

On the other hand, in exploring the eventual failure of Maggie's attempts to apply a philosophy of renunciation to her life, the narrator of *The Mill on the Floss* demonstrates more understanding of Maggie than Maggie demonstrates herself. However empowering her reading is, Maggie in the moments of her reading remains ignorant of her limited comprehension of à Kempis's philosophy and the pitfalls of trying to live out his teachings. Here, where the consequences of Maggie's misreading are more explicitly detailed than are Waldo's, transformative reading and a realistic view of one's own transformative reading cannot coincide. Bridging both sides of the browsing debate, parsing the complex relationship between understanding a book's ideas and the *feeling* of understanding a book, Eliot's novel illuminates a potential trade-off between emotionally connecting with a book and mastering a book in the primarily intellectual, detached terms purposeful selection facilitates. In refusing to dismiss what browsing and absorbed reading do for Maggie's subject formation and empowerment, even as she does not idealize Maggie's de-

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<sup>95</sup> George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, 289-90.

contextualized application of the text, Eliot demands attention to the many and sometimes-conflicting layers of active, agential reading.<sup>96</sup>

The advantages and limitations of browsing in texts like *The Story of an African Farm*, *Aurora Leigh*, and *The Mill on the Floss* appear to be largely a function of the browsers' characteristics: young, with limited resources for education, and in the case of Aurora and Maggie, further limited by the expectations and strictures placed on women. Even Mill, though an educated male, might be considered a sufficiently young enough adult—buckling under the weight of his father's influence as he attempts to carve out an independent place in the world—to fit in this category of “Bildungsroman”-like browsers. I conclude, however, with a glimpse at a browser of a different sort, the presumably adult and educated poet-speaker of Robert Browning's *The Ring and the Book* (1868-69). Forming a powerful relationship with a browsed-for book not to develop himself (or, like Aurora Leigh, to develop the self-as-writer), but instead to develop only his art, the experience of Browning's poet demonstrates the range of the browsing trope in Victorian literature. Browning's work suggests that intense need of many sorts, beyond those deriving from the reader's gender, age, or class status, may fuel the claims browsers make on books.

In *The Ring and the Book* (1868), the conflict explored in *The Mill on the Floss*—the extent to which browsers can claim to know and make use of books about which they know little—is placed in the context of artistic creation. Beginning with a scene of browsing, from which the browser finds a book that prompts him to write a poem, Browning interrogates the relationship between chance discovery, isolated reading, and inspiration. The narrative poem refashions the tale of a forgotten

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<sup>96</sup> Gabriel Betteredge in Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* (1868) is another example of a browser who is empowered with confidence and the ability to act productively when he peruses *Robinson Crusoe* randomly and encounters “prophetic” messages that resolve each of his problems. Collins's humorous portrayal of Betteredge's interpretations of *Crusoe* indicate that Betteredge is deluded in his belief that the text has been prepared specifically for him in particular moments. But the novel nevertheless allows the benefits of Betteredge's perceptions to stand, as Eliot partially does for Maggie. See Collins, *The Moonstone*.



Renaissance-era Italian murder trial as it is recorded in an obscure “old yellow book.”<sup>97</sup> Having discovered the yellow book while browsing at a book-stall in Florence, the poem’s speaker reads the entire volume in one day while wandering through the city. Realizing that a captivating story could emerge from the documents, the poet-speaker decides to use his imaginative powers to rewrite the dry factual record and make it “spark” to life for a modern British audience.<sup>98</sup> Like an alloy added to a gold ring, which mixes with pure gold to form the shape of a ring and then dissolves away, the poet-speaker declares that he adds his poetic inspiration to the old record to shape a newly invigorated narrative. Having summarized the whole narrative of the old yellow book in Book One of *The Ring and the Book*, he then retells the story as a series of dramatic monologues from the point of view of each of the major actors involved in the trial.

The poet-speaker’s right to retell the narrative of the old yellow book and his ability to tell it truthfully—his artistic ownership of the book, in a sense—are central questions of Book One, the poet-speaker’s own dramatic monologue. While critics generally agree that *The Ring and the Book* as a whole is a statement about the relativity of truth (evidenced through Browning’s chosen form of monologues that differently describe the same events), scholars have disagreed about the degree to which the poet-speaker is self-aware and forthright about his own complicity in being a biased, limited story teller: is he serious when he claims that it is possible to artistically render the narrative without distorting its veracity? Some scholars argue that we should take the poet-speaker at his word, suggesting that his ecstatic reading of the book and his metaphor of the ring and the alloy reflect his intention to foreground his personality as an individual reader and artist with a point of view.<sup>99</sup> Others argue that Browning and his poet-speaker are at odds, and that where Browning is aware of the poet-speaker’s biases and limitations, the speaker himself is not, or at least cheekily pretends not

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<sup>97</sup> Browning, *The Ring and the Book*, 1.677.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.458, 1.460, 1.755.

<sup>99</sup> See Krishan, “Browning and the Intelligent Uses of Anger in *The Ring and the Book*,” 205-24, and Mary Rose Sullivan, “The Function of Book I in *The Ring and the Book*,” 235-37.

to be.<sup>100</sup> As Herbert Tucker asserts, although the poet-speaker claims that his discovery of the yellow book is predestined and that his rewriting of it reveals “*the* truth of the matter,” in fact his entire construction of the fated finding of the yellow book demonstrates that the speaker is as delusional about his objectivity as are the other speakers of the poem.<sup>101</sup>

Notably, the criticism on both sides of the question makes much of the narrator’s discovery of the yellow book and his absorbed reading of it as evidence of his earnestness or disingenuousness in representing himself as the teller of “*the* truth of the matter.” Setting aside for a moment the question of the poet-speaker’s honesty, it is significant simply that the poet-speaker’s claim to be able to insightfully read and truthfully re-craft the old yellow book is based on the nature of his initial encounter with the book—that, effectively or not, he employs a trope of serendipitous browsing to assert this right. Tucker points to the poet-speaker’s emphasis on the providential nature of the discovery as a bogus claim to omniscience about the trial, as though the poet-speaker asserts his truthfulness because of his providentially appointed higher ground. Yet, the details of the poet-speaker’s browsing for and selecting the old yellow book indicate a more nuanced combination of fate and choice involved in his selection. The poet-speaker’s bold claim to identifying with the book and justifiably reworking it is bolstered not just by providence recognizing him in sending him the book, but also, like Maggie Tulliver, by the skill he demonstrates in recognizing providence, in being the kind of browser who can “activate” fate, so to speak, when it comes his way.

The poet-speaker significantly abstains from claiming any of the typical sources of expertise a reader might expect. He makes no mention of traditional sources of information or knowledge that might have equipped him to tell the story, such as an extensive education, a familiarity with Italian history or law, or additional research on the murder trial. He also gives little attention to the

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<sup>100</sup> See Thompson, “Authorial Detachment and Imagery in *The Ring and the Book*,” 671, and Tucker, *Epic: Britain’s Heroic Muse, 1790-1910*, 436-46.

<sup>101</sup> Tucker, *Epic: Britain’s Heroic Muse*, 436-46.

material forces of the European book market that bring the old yellow book, in conjunction with the books around it, to the book stall. In fact, the narrator repeatedly draws attention to the *lack* of these sources of contextualizing knowledge in his interpretation of the tale, highlighting instead his simultaneously self-guided and fated discovery of the book, governed both by what he brings to the browsing scenario and what is there waiting for him. “I found this book,” he declares,

Gave a *lira* for it, eightpence English just  
(Mark the predestination!) when a Hand,  
Always above my shoulder, pushed me once  
One day still fierce ‘mid many a day struck calm,  
Across a Square in Florence, crammed with booths.<sup>102</sup>

Beginning by asserting his role in obtaining the book through his use of “I” and the action verbs that describe what he did—“*I found* this book,” “*gave* a lira for it”—he then transfers the agency behind the discovery to the predestining “Hand,” reminiscent of the marginal “hand” guiding Maggie, that initially “pushed” him to the booth. He switches back once again as he details how, among the surrounding more “tempting” books he surveys, he latches on to the sight of his unassuming book with just “one glance of the lettered back” and immediately purchases it.<sup>103</sup> The narrator implies that his ability to recognize the right book results from his capable glance. But in neglecting to explain what it is about the “lettered back” of the chosen book that makes it in any way stand out in his judgment from its “compeers,” he also suggests that something besides his skill—something instinctual or providential, like the “Hand” that first pushes him to the booth—compels his choice.

At later moments in Book One, he similarly describes his discovery of the book as a mixture of his own actions and those of fate. Being all that remains of a once well-known story, the old yellow book, he explains, had been “left / By the roadside ‘mid the ordure, shards and weeds.”<sup>104</sup> He

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<sup>102</sup> Browning, *The Ring and the Book*, 1.38-43.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.75-83.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.672-673.

describes his entrance onto this scene of neglect as peculiarly relaxed: he “haply, wandering that lone way, / Kicked [up the book], turned it over, and recognized” a tale worth telling.<sup>105</sup> As in his description of his literal browsing for the book, the narrator’s metaphorical actions—wandering, kicking up the book and turning it over, recognizing it—are “haply” individual choices, movements and thoughts less motivated from within than responsive to what he finds without, but nevertheless marking him as a special reader because of his sensitivity to the appeal of a book that has been ignored by previous passersby.

The mixture of decisiveness and submission involved in his discovery not only gives the poet-speaker a uniquely close relationship with the text but also possession over the book that takes hold of him. His asserted ownership of the book is multi-layered, at once legal, physical, intellectual, and artistic. Reflecting his initial engagement with the book as an object—his selection of the book being based on nothing more than its unspecified “lettered back,” an at best indirect hint to its contents—the narrator continues to value the book’s thing-ness even after reading it. For example, he first offers to allow his readers to “Examine it yourselves!” and then anxiously takes possession again mainly on the grounds of the tangible pleasures the book offers, crying, “Give it me back! The thing’s restorative / I’ the sight and touch.”<sup>106</sup> The poet-speaker’s enraptured reading of the book follows this possessive pattern, apparent passivity in reading actually a mark of a different kind of readerly action at work. The poet-speaker refers to the book as his “prize” from which, while first reading it immediately after his purchase, none of the activity in the public square can distract him.<sup>107</sup> In carving out a private space for himself as a transfixed reader surrounded by daily busyness, the narrator reinforces the ownership he first establishes in describing the “Hand” that guides him to a book that his quick glance then singles out, while everyone else is oblivious.

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 1.674-75.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 1.38, 1.89-90.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 1.109.

The poet-speaker emphasizes that his highly framed, “owned” absorbed reading of the source text is authoritative, that he “mastered the contents, knew the whole truth” of the described events not through detached analysis, but through his apparently unmediated relationship with the book.<sup>108</sup> It follows that his rewriting of the book, his use of it as source material for his own account of the murder and trial, is founded on this unmediated possession. Describing the next stage of his relationship with the book, his use of it as source material for his own account, he declares that to prepare to write, he “fused [his] live soul and that inert stuff” in the book, adding that “something of mine” to it.<sup>109</sup> This “fusion” in writing resembles the two previous points of intense connection between the narrator and the book, his recognizing the book at the stall and his absorbed reading. By first allowing the text to take him over, the narrator is then able to take over it: to (re)interpret the events of the crime through only his fancy, through that “something of *mine*” that he brings to it, unpolluted by the interference of others.

Yet, as the unresolved critical debate about the poet-speaker’s accuracy and forthrightness in claiming this mastery of the contents suggests, there is little to support the poet-speaker’s mastery beyond his elaborately constructed claims to it—the poet-speaker’s unmediated selection and reading of the old yellow book is both the source of the strong understanding and the reason it is inscrutable to others. The ambiguity of the poet-speaker’s mastery of the book, combined with his unambiguously confident feeling about his reading and the concrete actions he takes from it, reflect a similar divide between forms of mastery over a book as that articulated by Eliot. As in *The Mill on the Floss*, the productivity of the browsers’ closeness with a book is upheld despite its problems: the poet-speaker’s browsing for and absorbed reading of the old yellow book is the foundation of *The*

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 1.117.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 1.469, 1.462.

*Ring and the Book*, in the sense that without that feeling of ownership, the poem would never have been written.<sup>110</sup>

### **Conclusion: browsing “as if for life”**

Much as the desperate David Copperfield reads “as if for life,” the Victorian browsers depicted in the above examples *browse* as if for life. Whether by practicing a lifelong habit of receptivity to books through serial browsing, or by reading serendipitously discovered books solely for their potential applicability to their own lives, these readers begin to connect to books and make them a part of their life narratives before they even crack the spine. Framed by these methods of browsing, absorbed reading may be understood as a distinctly agential act, its empowerment dependent on readers’ unmediated access to books and their lack of distinct purpose in reading, in some respects regardless of the identity of the reader and the contents of the book they take up. In also qualifying the empowerment that browsing affords, as Schreiner, Eliot, and perhaps Browning do, Victorian depictions of browsing additionally raise larger questions to consider in studies of reading: to what extent does a reader’s sense of empowerment itself constitute actual empowerment? And in cases where the nature of a reader’s discovery of a book plays a significant role in shaping their reading, how might that reader’s relationship to the book change through time and circumstance, as the reader moves farther from the moment and the place of the first encounter?<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> In describing forms of reading that differ from traditional critical reading, Warner offers an example of a reader who engages with texts much like the nineteenth-century “serendipitous” browsers that I discuss: the seventeenth-century reader Mary Rowlandson, while a captive to Native Americans in New England, opens the Bible randomly and reads passages that she interprets as messages from God. As Warner asserts, by opening the book randomly, Rowlandson “helps to ensure that her reading will *not* be an expression of her agency,” even as she is active, not passive, by practicing “repetition, incorporation, and affective regulation” in her efforts to understand and make sense of what she reads (“Uncritical Reading,” 31). Warner frames Rowlandson’s openness to the text as a reading practice that is active but un-agential, stressing God’s (perceived) agency over Rowlandson’s. However, I would argue that at least for serendipitous browsers like the poet-speaker of *The Ring and the Book*, from a different viewpoint the act of accepting a book’s messages as a fated message does constitute a form of agency.

<sup>111</sup> The powerful emotions evoked by both serial and serendipitous browsing in these Victorian texts have a parallel in our own time of increasing digitization. A feeling about the power of book browsing still persists, shaping scholars’ sense of the role that selection plays in their research and their impressions of what they find, much as browsing was thought to shape Victorian readers’ feelings about the books they read. See Greene, “The Effectiveness of Browsing,” 313-16; Massis, “‘Serendipitous’ Browsing versus Library Space,” 178-82; and Barclay, “The Myth of Browsing,” 52-54.

## Chapter 4

### Her Life, My Life, Your Life, Our Lives in *Middlemarch*: Guiding the Modern Reader through Victorian Fiction

In a 2015 *New Yorker* article, novelist Ceridwen Dovey describes her preferred method for choosing books in terms reminiscent of the Victorian browsers discussed in the previous chapter. Dovey, like Professor Henry Morley, who insisted that Victorian readers be allowed to browse and choose books according to “the turn of [their] individuality,” is skeptical of reading “prescription,” of “the peculiar evangelism of certain readers” who “[thrust] a book into your hands with a beatific gleam in their eyes, with no allowance for the fact that books mean different things to people—or different things to the same person—at various points in our lives.”<sup>1</sup> She relishes the connections she draws between the books themselves and “the randomly meaningful nature” of how she stumbles upon them: “on the bus after a breakup, in a backpackers’ hostel in Damascus, or in the dark library stacks at graduate school, while browsing instead of studying.” And yet, the purpose of Dovey’s article is to detail her surprised pleasure in discovering that at least one version of reading by prescription—bibliotherapy—can actually enhance her identification with books. Having completed a questionnaire describing her current mental preoccupations and having received in response a personalized list of recommended reading from a London bibliotherapist, Dovey experiences a curative effect from the curated book selection. She becomes a convert to bibliotherapy’s power to help readers connect with books because of, not despite, the mediation of another, “expert” reader.

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<sup>1</sup> Dovey, “Can Reading Make You Happier?”, *The New Yorker*, 9 June 2015.

Dovey's reflections demonstrate how the Victorians' concerns about book selection and its relationship to reading have survived into our modern day. The sense that we are awash in too many books for our own good certainly persists. In his 1877 *Fortnightly Review* essay advising lay readers to turn to critics to select their reading, Mark Pattison underscores the urgency of guided selection by attempting to calculate the vast gulf between the number of books published each year and the number of books a single reader can read in one year<sup>2</sup>; Dovey similarly stresses the value of bibliotherapy in 2015 by suggesting that readers calculate how many books they can get through before death, an exercise that will lead them to realize, in the words of one bibliotherapist, that they must become "highly selective."

However, the two articles notably frame the nature and purpose of guides to reading differently. Pattison conservatively assigns credentialed critics the task of recommending books specifically because of critics' ability to survey the whole of literary history and—like the cultured bookseller described in Chapter Two and like Ruskin's young man selecting only "true books"—to pluck out of the masses the books most worthy to be read by *all* readers, based on their collectively agreed-upon aesthetic, moral, and intellectual value. The flavor of bibliotherapy Dovey describes, by contrast, eschews cultural status as a determinant of books' value. Reading is chosen by an authority figure, but unlike in browsing, the therapist's choices are still directed by a certain reader's stated emotional needs, not the reader's imagined intellectual needs or the overarching standards of an institution. Even when they apply their prescriptions broadly to a wide readership, the bibliotherapists that Dovey consults, Ella Berthoud and Susan Elderkin, disrupt the staid methods of literary categorization Pattison references and instead encourage readers to view novels whimsically in terms of common, though by no means universally experienced, personal "ailments." Thus *The Novel Cure*, their compilation of book recommendations organized by various physical and

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<sup>2</sup> Pattison, "Books and Critics," *The Fortnightly Review*, 1877.



emotional conditions, reworks Victorian novel categories in a similar fashion to Mudie's Edwardian catalogues, highlighting elements of fiction that might be "of interest" to a given reader in a given, if fleeting, phase: *Silas Marner* as a guide to single parenthood, *Wuthering Heights* to get over a breakup, *Our Mutual Friend* as one of "The Ten Best Novels to Drown Out Snoring."<sup>3</sup>

As a guided experience toward emotional intimacy with books, then, *The Novel Cure* and bibliotherapy more generally represent a hybrid of the authoritative and democratic methods of guidance I have explored from the Victorian period. Such guidance bridges, or attempts to bridge, the gap between the literary expert and the needs, interests, and feelings of the reader, the gap that informed the balance of prestige and accessibility in Mudie's catalogues, that plagued the "cultured" bookseller of the nineteenth century, and that fictional Victorian browsers ignored by making themselves the experts. The Victorians themselves were no strangers to directed emotional experiences with books, similar to those offered by *The Novel Cure*: as Dovey mentions in her article, even George Eliot was "rumored to have overcome her grief" at her partner George Henry Lewes's death "through a program of guided reading" with her future husband, John Cross.

This concluding chapter examines how modern readers, in their turn, are guided to glean emotional sustenance from Victorian literature—specifically, in fact, from George Eliot's writing. With an aim to better understanding the delicate give-and-take Dovey articulates between readers' reliance on experts and their personal relationship to texts, I explicate the strategies of guidance in Rebecca Mead's *My Life in Middlemarch* (2014). Crafted in the fairly young tradition of the bibliomemoir, a genre resembling bibliotherapy that both relies upon and rejects expertise in reading, Mead's work, I argue, paradoxically attempts to mediate an unmediated experience for readers. Even as she informs readers' understanding of George Eliot, of *Middlemarch*, and of books in general, Mead models reading that privileges the individual reader's impressions and feelings over expertly

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<sup>3</sup> Berthoud and Elderkin, *The Novel Cure: From Abandonment to Zestlessness: 751 Books to Cure What Ails You*, 344, 46, 350.

provided information. *My Life in Middlemarch* thus itself mediates readers' access to Eliot's novel, yet constantly gestures toward the possibility that readers might experience Eliot's work without mediation. Mead's work at times risks overreaching in asserting the potential of a pure connection between book and readers, while at times also exaggerating the alienating effects of experts' commentary. Yet, in conjunction with other types of commentary, *My Life in Middlemarch* highlights the value of multiple reading strategies and multiple ways of putting information about texts to use, demonstrating what readers may learn about books and about themselves by using their lives and emotions as a primary lens for reading.

### **The bibliomemoir and academic criticism**

The complicated relationship Mead establishes between herself and literary experts is common to the bibliomemoir, and is in fact one of its defining features. While bibliomemoirs are not new—one review points to Henry Miller's 1952 *The Books in My Life* as the first—they have only recently been grouped and named as a genre.<sup>4</sup> Awareness of the bibliomemoir as a genre is so new, and the number of bibliomemoirs so small, that there is not yet an *Oxford English Dictionary* entry for the word “bibliomemoir,” nor is there a substantial body of academic scholarship analyzing bibliomemoirs as distinct from memoirs generally. Mead herself notes that while her work was inspired by “a number of books [she thinks] of as being in the same family” as her book—“books about books or books about writing or books about reading”—she did not know the term

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<sup>4</sup> Davies, “For the Joy of Reading: 12 Bibliomemoirs,” *Pages & Proofs: A Book Blog from the Staff at AbeBooks.co.uk*, 30 Jan. 2014. Davies gives several other examples of bibliomemoirs (some of which I will discuss below), including Mead's *My Life in Middlemarch*, Wendy Lesser's *Why I Read: The Serious Pleasure of Books* (2014), Geoff Dyer's *Out of Sheer Rage: Wrestling with D.H. Lawrence* (1997), Christopher Beha's *The Whole Five Feet: What the Great Books Taught Me About Life, Death and Pretty Much Everything Else* (2009), David Denby's *Great Books: My Adventures with Homer, Rousseau, Woolf, and Other Indestructible Writers of the Western World* (1996), Rick Gekoski's *Outside of a Dog: A Bibliomemoir* (2009), and Alice Ozma's *The Reading Promise: My Father and the Books We Shared* (2011). Other books that have been or might be classified as bibliomemoirs include Alexander McCall Smith's *Why Read Moby-Dick?* (2011) and Karla Holloway's *Bookmarks: Reading in Black and White (A Memoir)* (2006), as well as the bestsellers *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books* (2003) by Azar Nafisi and *Rereadings: Seventeen Writers Revisit Books They Love* (2006), a collection edited by Anne Fadiman. Few of these works proclaim themselves to be “bibliomemoirs”—Gekoski's *Outside of a Dog: A Bibliomemoir* is a notable exception.

“bibliomemoir” until she read a review of *My Life in Middlemarch* written by Joyce Carol Oates.<sup>5</sup>

When references to the genre do appear, however—mainly in reviews and on blogs—they tend to describe the bibliomemoir as at once hybrid in form and diverse in its influences on the one hand, and self-evident and consistent in its purpose on the other. In her review of Mead’s book, Oates pronounces the bibliomemoir to be a “rarely attempted” “subspecies of literature combining criticism and biography with the intimate, confessional tone of autobiography.”<sup>6</sup> *The New Yorker* adds a couple of ingredients to the mix, describing the bibliomemoir as “a new subgenre” that blends “literary criticism, autobiography, self-help, and immersion journalism.”<sup>7</sup> The balance of criticism, self-help, biography, journalism, and autobiography, as well as the number of books the memoir considers, varies: as journalist Lucy Scholes suggests, the bibliomemoir is not only “the hottest new genre in town,” but “the most flexible to boot,” able to “[bend] itself to the individual author’s needs.”<sup>8</sup> A blurb in the front matter of *My Life in Middlemarch* by author Margot Livesey expresses this in-betweenness of the genre, characterizing Mead’s work in terms of what it is not rather than in terms of what it is, “not quite biography, not quite memoir, not quite literary criticism.”<sup>9</sup> But while each bibliomemoir formulates a unique approach to its subject, as Scholes asserts, “the basic premise is always the same—a meditation on how reading shapes our lives, and our lives shape reading,” or as the journalist Jane Sullivan puts it, “a book about reading books.” In other words, though they employ some of the conventions of other genres, bibliomemoirs’ central purpose is to understand and explicate books through the author’s life experiences and vice versa, and to reflect on how the act of reading is personally meaningful.

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<sup>5</sup> Mead, *My Life in Middlemarch*, 304.

<sup>6</sup> Oates, “Rebecca Mead’s ‘My Life in Middlemarch,’” *The New York Times*, 23 Jan. 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Qtd. in Jane Sullivan, “Turning Pages: What’s the Point of Bibliomemoirs?,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 Nov. 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Scholes, “*My Salinger Year*: How Reading Shapes Our Lives,” *BBC Culture*, 21 Oct. 2014.

<sup>9</sup> See the front matter of Mead, *My Life in Middlemarch*.

The bibliomemoir is certainly “confessional,” an exploration of one reader’s relationship to books from that reader’s point of view: as Mead writes, part of her purpose is to examine “how *Middlemarch* has shaped my understanding of my own life” in various stages while studying “how George Eliot’s life shaped her fiction, and how her fiction shaped her.”<sup>10</sup> But bibliomemoirs are also often portrayed as guides to other readers—and bibliomemoirs’ potential to guide is thought to be one reason an interest in the genre has emerged strongly at this moment, when readers, in the eyes of at least some commentators, are lost. Sullivan suggests that “in an age when the habit of regular reading is thought to be dying out,” and when there are at the same time overwhelming options for reading, the bibliomemoir has come “to the rescue” of readers “insecure both about the value of reading itself and whether they are making the right selections.” In addressing this latter insecurity, the bibliomemoir’s purpose is fairly pragmatic: to recommend certain books to readers, by showing how those books are valued by the bibliomemoirist. In a piece on bibliomemoirs in *The Observer*, Rachel Cooke quotes professor John Sutherland, who suggests that bibliomemoirs are “a way of imposing geography on the huge access we have now.”<sup>11</sup> Cooke also examines how the bibliomemoir speaks to the larger insecurity Sullivan references, about whether reading itself is still valuable. Wondering if bibliomemoirs are a sign of our culture’s inability to read deeply—if people read bibliomemoirs as substitutes for reading the books the bibliomemoirs discuss—Cooke interviewed bibliomemoirists to see if they saw their books as shortcuts to reading. She found that, on the contrary, the authors hoped their bibliomemoirs would encourage reading and rereading, as well as deeper consideration of how we read and why. One bibliomemoirist, Andy Miller, had even created a ten-step program to help people make room in their busy lives for more, and more thoughtful, reading. More than simply guiding readers to certain books, these bibliomemoirists

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<sup>10</sup> Mead, *My Life in Middlemarch*, 9-10.

<sup>11</sup> Cooke, “The Woman Who Went to the Library and Read Every Book on the Shelf,” *The Observer*, 16 Aug. 2014.

hoped to guide readers to perform a certain kind of reading, one that “place[s] books in the real world,” in Miller’s words.

*My Life in Middlemarch* is similarly partly a guide for readers, and Mead resembles Miller in her hope to make her subject more “real” for readers. In an interview with *Publishers Weekly*, she explained that she loves the idea of her book prompting people to read *Middlemarch*. And at least some readers report that *My Life in Middlemarch* has turned them toward the novel, or toward the novel again. In one review, Emily Sutherland comments that Mead’s depiction of her close relationship to her subject has inspired her: “Has Mead succeeded in bringing readers into the same sense of involvement with the work of George Eliot and particularly *Middlemarch* as she has experienced? I can only speak for one reader, [but] I was inspired to return to the novel and read it for the third time.”<sup>12</sup> Harold Bloom concurs: in a blurb in the front matter of *My Life in Middlemarch*, he declares, “Mead has discovered an original and highly personal way to make herself an inhabitant both of the book and of George Eliot’s imaginary city. Though I have read and taught the book these many years I find myself desiring to go back to it after reading Rebecca Mead’s work.” However, in her interview, Mead suggests that she is even more concerned that her readers “recognize themselves in” her book by reflecting on “a book that resonates with them throughout their lives,” even if that book is not *Middlemarch*.<sup>13</sup> Put another way, for Mead *My Life in Middlemarch* is as much a model for how to read in order to identify with a book as it is a particular reading of a particular novel.

If one of her desires is to “teach” identification generally, so to speak, Mead’s choice of a Victorian novel, and of *Middlemarch* in particular, is apt: a novel like *Middlemarch* promises to be both a suitable subject for identification and a thought-provoking one. While readers can and do identify with texts of every kind from every era, Victorian literature is prominent as an object for

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<sup>12</sup> Sutherland, “Review of Rebecca Mead, *The Road to Middlemarch: My Life with George Eliot*,” 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Bridget Potter, “Getting Personal: PW Talks with Rebecca Mead,” *Publishers Weekly*, 2013.

contemporary readers' identification. As John Kucich and Dianne Sadoff assert in their study of how our culture has taken up the Victorian, rightly or wrongly, we have come to look at the Victorians as our "historical other."<sup>14</sup> This preoccupation is exemplified in both scholars' identification of the Victorian period as the time when modernity emerged and in commercial culture's embrace of the Victorian in, for example, the recent proliferation of Victorian-era film settings. The Victorians have been cast as the originators of many contemporary trends and concerns, including consumerism and capitalism; gender- and sex-based movements such as feminism and gay culture; and the explosion of industrialization and technological development. While some believe that drawing these parallels is a form of "cannibalization" or "misrepresentation," others, the editors note, see our identification with the Victorian as "politically productive, as offering effective strategies for the fashioning of political positions, values, and subjectivities."<sup>15</sup>

The perceived need to "connect" with the Victorians is evident, to use one example, in a 2011 initiative called the "Victorian Literature Challenge," which was begun by Scottish blogger Bethany Anderson and which over one hundred others joined. Anderson invited anyone interested to read a number of Victorian novels during the year, choosing their level of commitment ("Sense and Sensibility" (1-4 books), "Great Expectations" (5-9 books), "Hard Times" (10-14 books), and "Desperate Remedies" (15 or more books)).<sup>16</sup> Anderson's own professed love for the Victorians reflects Kucich and Sadoff's framing of the Victorians as our counterpart in modernity: "Victorian writers examined all aspects of humanity," she explains, including "the highs and lows of society, the roles of gender, the place of religion and/or lack of in the world." Anderson's fascination with Victorian works is also motivated by a sense of community—from gossiping with her high school

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<sup>14</sup> Kucich and Sadoff, *Victorian Afterlife: Postmodern Culture Rewrites the Nineteenth Century*, x-xi.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, x, xxv.

<sup>16</sup> George, "Victorian Literature Challenge 2011," *Edinburgh Reporter*, 13 Dec. 2010.

friends about the “soap-like” novels of Thomas Hardy, she has transitioned as a young adult to creating a shared Victorian reading experience online.

At the same time, some of Anderson’s fellow bloggers decidedly do not describe their choice to read Victorian novels as being based a sense of affinity with the Victorians. Anderson’s challenge, one blogger notes, “will be an excellent kick in the pants” to read works by Victorians that she dislikes (“you know, that Dickens chap”); another observes that reading Victorian novels will be difficult because they “tend to run really long,” and a third divides her novels into three categories, those with beloved characters, those others have recommended to her, and those she has no desire to read but feels she must.<sup>17</sup> As these various motivations indicate, if some contemporary readers see their world in Victorian fiction, others experience Victorian novels as distant—through their extreme length, or their didactic style, or their unfamiliar setting—and read because of a cultural mandate, to satisfy an obligation, or even to overcome their fear that they are not up to the challenge. Unsurprisingly, the same sense of distance, mixed with begrudging obligation, emerges in Amazon.com reviews of *Middlemarch*, which runs to close to one thousand pages and is well known for its lengthy narrator commentary. Amongst the many reviews extolling the novel as one of the greatest novels in the English language, one finds many other reviews like the one titled “Get Your Hiking Boots—It’s Mostly Uphill”: the reviewer declares the novel to be “well-crafted” but “dated” and “dry, dry, dry” in its treatment of nineteenth-century politics, and he or she argues that reading the novel’s praise of Dorothea’s “overabundance of virtue” is “a chore.”<sup>18</sup> Another asks, “When a book truly bores you, what difference does it make how fine a novel it is?”<sup>19</sup> Such reviews indicate that although most readers are aware of critics’ disinterested appraisal of *Middlemarch* as a “fine” novel, a view that seeps into broader culture and makes *Middlemarch* a kind of gatekeeping work

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<sup>17</sup> Allie, “2011 Victorian Literature Challenge,” *A Literary Odyssey: A Journey Through Literature*, 27 Nov. 2010; Aasi, “Victorian Literature Challenge 2011,” *Books in the Spotlight*, 25 Dec. 2010; and Claire, *The Captive Reader*, 13 Dec. 2010.

<sup>18</sup> Spare-Time Critic, “Get Your Hiking Boots—It’s Mostly a Chore,” “*Middlemarch* (Penguin Classics),” 4 Oct. 2002.

<sup>19</sup> “Fine literature, but. . .,” “*Middlemarch* (Penguin Classics),” 1 Aug. 1999.

supposedly appreciated by the most sophisticated readers, some readers struggle to value a book that they cannot identify with or *feel* with.

While Kucich and Sadoff assert the Victorians' perceived relevance and analyze *why* the Victorians have remained or become newly important, they give little attention in their introduction to *how* readers, including the more skeptical or simply bored readers cited above, come to, or struggle to, see themselves in Victorian fiction. As her own characterization of her work indicates, Mead's *My Life in Middlemarch* can be read as something of a how-to manual for such identification. Writing of her first encounter with the novel, Mead tells of her reaction:

This book, which had been published serially in eight volumes almost a hundred years before I was born, wasn't distant or dusty, but arresting in the acuteness of its psychological penetration and the snap of its sentences. Through it, George Eliot spoke with an authority and a generosity that was wise and essential and profound. I couldn't believe how good it was.<sup>20</sup>

Although Mead's comment that *Middlemarch* "wasn't distant or dusty" speaks to her own previous preconceptions, it seems implicitly, and probably knowingly on Mead's part, to challenge not only her younger, pre-*Middlemarch*-reading self, but also her own readers who might dismiss the novel as "dry, dry, dry." "I couldn't believe how good it was," she states—but she implies, "Neither will *you*, once you are done with my book." A blurb from *Newsweek* included in the book's front matter more strongly implies the relevance of *Middlemarch*, as read through Mead's eyes: "This is Mead's life inside a book, inside the fictional Midlands village Eliot created. By the end, though, this could be your life, too. As Mead writes, 'She makes Middlemarchers of us all.'" The "she" in this last sentence refers to Eliot, but it could just as well refer to Mead herself. If Eliot has not quite made Middlemarchers of *all* readers, Mead will pick up the torch to do so. Taking on the challenge of identifying with a particularly remote-seeming Victorian novel, as the reviews of *Middlemarch* frame Eliot's work, might

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<sup>20</sup> Mead, *My Life in Middlemarch*, 4.



further serve Mead's larger purpose: when readers can see Mead's life in *Middlemarch*, they may also identify the books that "resonate with them throughout their lives."

In sharing how she identifies with a cultural giant like Eliot, Mead dances a delicate dance with academia. Given that bibliomemoirists like Mead write entire books about books, and that they incorporate literary criticism into their work, it is not surprising that most have formal training in criticism. Mead is a journalist with an undergraduate degree in literature from Oxford. Many other bibliomemoirists majored in English in college and attended graduate school in literary studies, before going on to become novelists or, as in the case of bibliomemoirists Rick Gekoski and Phyllis Rose, English literature professors. Their backgrounds show in the ease with which they cite informative sources on the authors and books they study. Even as they draw on literary criticism and biography to explore their subjects, however, bibliomemoirists tend to be wary of how such sources, external to their life experiences and impressions from reading, can obscure the relationship they want to depict between their lives and books, and the relationship they want to foster in their own readers.

A survey of bibliomemoirs would suggest that it is almost obligatory for the bibliomemoirist to make a statement rejecting the importance of professional expertise, the literary theory and the research-based analyses that scholars publish and teach. This trope holds even for bibliomemoirists who intentionally focus on books from the traditional literary canon—who turn to books chosen for them, if indirectly, by academics—because they desire to engage with and master works of high culture. For example, writing a bibliomemoir about his semester in the 1990s spent as a returning student in a literature course at Columbia University—where he studied, as the title of his book indicates, "Great Books: Homer, Rousseau, Woolf, and Other Indestructible Writers of the Western World" in a thoroughly academic setting—David Denby declares that he will "stay away from secondary sources" as much as possible and "rely on [his] own responses" in addition to what was

discussed in the classroom.<sup>21</sup> “Writing the book,” he asserts, “I wanted to avoid the technology of criticism; I longed to commit the unspeakable sin (in academic circles) of bellettrism—the sin of writing the book for the reader’s pleasure and my own.” Novelist and journalist Christopher Beha strikes a similar note in his 2009 bibliomemoir about reading the “Five-Foot Shelf,” a Harvard-issued collection of “great books.” Completing this reading challenge a few years after finishing college, Beha reflects periodically on the different flavors of each of the two reading “eras” in his life. “In the classroom,” he observes at one moment, for example, “we might have evaluated Socrates’ self-proclaimed ignorance as a theory of epistemology. But we would never have asked whether it represented a stance worth emulating.”<sup>22</sup> Both Denby and Beha imply a friction between the ways they want to read—ways that apply what they are reading to the experiences of their lives and embrace affective reading experiences—and their awareness that their chosen reading material has already been well traversed by academic readers who “evaluate” rather than apply or feel.

Others not only explicitly distinguish their work from academic criticism, but also disparage academic criticism in order to make the distinction especially clear. They suggest that academic criticism inhibits their relationship with books not just because such criticism focuses on analyzing and evaluating literature without connecting it to lived life, but because it does so with jargoned pretension that masks criticism’s futility and meaninglessness. In his 1991 memoir detailing his relationship to the works of John Updike, for instance, the novelist Nicholson Baker engages in a facetious thought experiment about how his book might look as an academic work, characterizing academics as compulsively searching for theories and methods of reading to invent in order to compete with each other: “If I were an American academic, I don’t think I would be able to resist turning my memory-filtered approach to Updike into a method. I would check hurriedly to be sure that Walter Benjamin or one of the Frenchmen hadn’t done it already [before proceeding]. . . . But

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<sup>21</sup> Denby, *Great Books: My Adventures with Homer, Rousseau, Woolf, and Other Indestructible Writers of the Western World*, 16-17.

<sup>22</sup> Beha, *The Whole Five Feet: What the Great Books Taught Me About Life, Death, and Pretty Much Everything Else*, 31.

I'm not an American academic."<sup>23</sup> Geoff Dyer, whose 1997 bibliomemoir chronicles his failure to write a "sober, academic study of D.H. Lawrence," is so irritated by a collection of Lawrence criticism someone gives him that he literally burns the book, demanding in his outrage to know how "these people with no feeling for literature have ended up *teaching* it, writing about it?"<sup>24</sup> He justifies burning the book because, he says, "writing like that kills everything it touches. That is the hallmark of academic criticism: it kills everything it touches." For Dyer, criticism is "a crime against literature" because it is written by people who have not lived enough of life to "know anything about it." Although Dyer concedes that objectively he knows scholars must have lives, too, he quickly reverts, with some humor, to his critique of them:

I withdraw [my critique] unconditionally—but I also want to let it stand, conditionally. . . . Research! Research! The very word is like a bell, tolling the death and the imminent turning to dust of whichever poor sod is being researched. Spare me. Spare me the drudgery of systematic examinations and give me the lightning flashes of those wild books in which there is no attempt to cover the ground thoroughly or reasonably.

Through his language—"Research! The very word is like a bell"—Dyer displays some of his own exclusionary cultural capital, alluding to Keats's final lines in "Ode to a Nightingale" but neglecting to flag that reference for the less well-read reader. Dyer nevertheless persists in positioning himself as an expert more in touch than literary critics with readers' lived reality, an assessment of academia's aloofness reinforced by Rick Gekoski, a former English professor who asserts, in his 2009 bibliomemoir, that "teaching in an English department . . . stiffened [his] emotional and intellectual sinews, drained [his] reservoirs of delight, made [him] (more) pompous and domineering."<sup>25</sup> For such bibliomemoirists, research- and theory-based approaches to literature, as well as academic culture more generally, drain literature of its potential to speak to readers emotionally and even, as Gekoski suggests, to be intellectually meaningful.

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<sup>23</sup> Baker, *U and I: A True Story*, 90-92.

<sup>24</sup> Dyer, *Out of Sheer Rage: In the Shadow of D.H. Lawrence*, 100-03.

<sup>25</sup> Gekoski, *Outside of a Dog: A Bibliomemoir*, 223.

Other bibliomemoirists distance themselves from academia out of appreciation for the spontaneous or self-directed encounters with books Dovey describes herself preferring. For example, Phyllis Rose, author of *The Shelf, from LEQ to LES: Adventures in Extreme Reading* (2014), designed her bibliomemoir as a meditation on books she chose from a random shelf in the New York Society Library. Once an English professor herself, Rose explains, “Literary critics wrongly favor the famous and canonical—that is, writers chosen for us by others—[and so] I wanted to sample, more democratically, the actual ground of literature.”<sup>26</sup> Rose implies that the academic establishment has diminished readers’ opportunities to make their own discoveries, to forge relationships with books through the circumstances of life that bring books to them in an organic way. Although Rose’s bibliomemoir ends up highlighting certain books for *her* readers, which is not entirely democratic, her method serves as a model for how readers might go outside of the canon to have meaningful reading experiences. And like her fellow bibliomemoirists, in her depictions of her reading experiences, Rose is motivated to emphasize her feelings, impressions, and personal experiences by her belief that academic criticism in the late twentieth century zapped literature of its “relevance to life,” making “any attempt to justify literature as giving the reader something” a suspect claim.<sup>27</sup>

In its declared relationship to professional literary criticism, *My Life in Middlemarch* is of a piece with these bibliomemoirs. Mead denounces academia and positions herself as especially qualified to denounce it for the lay reader, as a non-scholar who has scholarly roots, a reader once attracted to academic culture who has wisely forsaken its conventions for a better way of reading. Writing of her interest in the novel during her adolescence, she recalls: “I knew that some important critics considered *Middlemarch* to be the greatest novel in the English language, and I wanted to be among those who understood why.”<sup>28</sup> Mead’s simultaneous reticence as a novice reader in this

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<sup>26</sup> Phyllis Rose, *The Shelf, from LEQ to LES: Adventures in Extreme Reading*, 3.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

<sup>28</sup> Mead, *My Life in Middlemarch*, 6.

recollection, and her vague ambition to associate with “some important critics,” aligns her with some of the readers reviewing Eliot on Amazon.com. Invoking her youthful, uninformed reading, Mead enables readers to identify with her as someone who is decidedly not an “important critic” but who, perhaps like them, has longed to be admitted to the club. Identifying less prestigious but more solidly realized motivations for reading the novel, Mead also gives these same readers license to make *Middlemarch* a personal read, despite its intimidating cultural status. For example, echoing Bethany Anderson, the blogger who read Hardy in high school in order to chat about him with her friends, Mead describes her adolescent reading more generally as part of a strategy for making sense of, and connecting with, her own social circle. She writes that she read F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *Tender Is the Night*, for example, on the recommendation of her friend Sarah and forever associated that novel with that friend; she read Virginia Woolf on the recommendation of her friend Kate and became “sure [she] was missing more than [she] was understanding, which is exactly how [she] felt about Kate.”<sup>29</sup> Mead here replaces “some important critics” with “critics” important to *her*, others readers whose traits influence how she reads their recommendations. As a bibliomemoir, in which Mead to some extent makes herself known to her readers, *My Life in Middlemarch* performs (if at some remove) the same kind of guidance as a Sarah or a Kate, substituting a warm, concrete relationship as a motive for reading for the onus of reading to satisfy an anonymous group of critics, a motive which, if natural and common, ultimately smacks of artificiality and a certain immaturity in Mead’s rendering.

The distinction Mead implicitly draws between reading for large-scale cultural reasons and reading for small-scale social relationships is paralleled in the distinction she draws between the critical agenda of collective professional reading and the emotion-driven reading of the individual, and the valuation she gives to each. She justifies returning to *Middlemarch* in her forties by explaining

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 6.

that after dabbling in this and that topic as a journalist for so long, she finds a desire to “turn my attention to something that mattered to me,” to “recover the sense of intellectual and emotional immersion in books” and “go back to being a reader.”<sup>30</sup> Notably, Mead equates “being a reader” with *immersion* in books, dismissing the types of reading she has done as a journalist—focused, short-term analytical reading aimed toward producing a piece of writing—as not reading at all. While she includes “intellectual” immersion as a goal of rereading *Middlemarch*, Mead in practice differentiates her version of immersion from that of professional readers by playing up her emotional immersion in texts at the expense of her intellectual engagement. She describes her time studying literature at Oxford, for instance, as disaffecting, in the same sense as do Baker, Dyer, Rose, and other biblomeinorists:

I was studying English literature because I loved books, a common enough motivation among students of literature, but I soon discovered that love didn’t have much purchase when it came to our studies. It was the mideighties, the era of critical theory. . . . I’d never heard of critical theory before I got to Oxford, but I soon discovered that it was what the most sophisticated-seeming undergraduates were engaged by. . . . Books—or texts, as they were called by those versed in theory—weren’t supposed merely to be read, but to be interrogated, as if they had committed some criminal malfeasance.<sup>31</sup>

Mead once again frames herself as the novice reader closed out by “sophisticated-seeming” critics—“I’d never heard of critical theory before I got to Oxford.” But importantly, she writes *My Life in Middlemarch* with her Oxford literary degree already in hand, and she offers no sense that her brush with critical theory altered her innate adolescent love of books. Standing by her affective, “un”sophisticated approach to literature in her post-education life, Mead asserts her credibility as a critic of academia, as a willed novice reader who is also “in the know” about academics.

Mead returns to this accusation throughout *My Life in Middlemarch*, repeatedly contrasting her ability to find rich emotive material in literature with scholars’ inability to do more than make dry

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 145.

arguments. In analyzing George Eliot's relationship with Mark Pattison, for example, Mead supports a theory that Pattison—who insisted on readers' use of critics, rather than their own inclinations, to select reading material—was the basis for *Middlemarch*'s scholarly Edward Casaubon, the character famously incapable of accessing real feeling in life or in books, doomed to compile endless notes of interest to no one.<sup>32</sup> The purported link indicates Mead's sense that guidance from a detached critic points readers away from meaningful reading. When she writes of her own experience studying in college, by contrast, Mead highlights her success in connecting her studies to the world around her. She describes long days in Oxford's library taking notes on "poetry, novels, and critical texts"; in the same paragraph, though, she observes that she not only studied during these long days, but also people-watched, socialized, and flirted, because after all, "life happened in the library."<sup>33</sup> Bringing books, social interaction, and its associated emotion together into the same physical space, Mead emphasizes how she wove *her* version of literary studies into her total life, immersing each in the other, despite the pressure at Oxford to do otherwise.

And yet, of course, the allergy that Mead and other bibliomemoirists profess to having against academic criticism is to some degree qualified, both by how bibliomemoirs actually engage with criticism and by the actual state of academic criticism itself. As the definitions cited above suggest, bibliomemoirs are classified partly *as* literary criticism, and as I have mentioned, they use the work done by literary scholars to inform their understanding of their subjects. In the convention of popular books, the body of the text in *My Life in Middlemarch* contains few citations and attributions. But a section of "Bibliographical Notes and Acknowledgements" at the end of the book amounts to a fifteen-page description of the sources that helped Mead to explicate "how *Middlemarch* has shaped [her] understanding of [her] own life," as well as "how George Eliot's life shaped her fiction, and

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 167-68.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 7.

how her fiction shaped her.”<sup>34</sup> Along with primary sources, these citations include the works of many biographical and literary scholars, including Gordon S. Haight, Rosemarie Bodenheimer, Leah Price, Stanley Fish, and Gillian Beer. In addition to showing her to be well-read in the literature about George Eliot, Mead’s acknowledgements carry a tone of genuine gratitude for the research that has been done by others to make *My Life in Middlemarch* possible: “I particularly admire,” she writes, for example, “Rosemarie Bodenheimer’s *The Real Life of Mary Ann Evans*.” As I will discuss, Bodenheimer is engaged in a project quite different from Mead’s, determined to avoid, she asserts in the first chapter of her Eliot biography, “the errors of exploitation in which other people’s letters are either used in the service of our own ideological arguments or believed in as keys to personality.”<sup>35</sup> While Mead frequently digresses in her discussion of Eliot and *Middlemarch* to examine the shortcomings of scholarship, she rarely takes moments to pause and reflect on its usefulness. However, her apparent comfort with, and use of, work like Bodenheimer’s suggests that she has a more positive relationship to academia overall than her railing on Oxford scholars and students would imply.

In part, it seems that bibliomemoirists express aversion to literary criticism—however they actually view and use the range of criticism at their disposal—because the eras of high theory and of suspicious reading in literary studies serve for them as a synecdoche of literary studies more broadly. The timing of the rise of the bibliomemoir is telling: Denby, Dyer, and Baker published their bibliomemoirs in the 1990s, and although their bibliomemoirs are more recent, Gekoski, Rose, and Mead draw on their experiences with academia in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s to characterize it. Bibliomemoirists’ criticisms of academia’s elitism, obscure language, minute focus on insignificant topics, and absence of affect align with criticism often leveled at scholarship of this era. As John Kucich argues, suspicious reading and historicism, for one, have been consistently “scapegoated as

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 9-10.

<sup>35</sup> Bodenheimer, *The Real Life of Mary Ann Evans: George Eliot, Her Letters and Fiction*, 19.



uniformly adversarial and arcane,” implicated with “critical arrogance.”<sup>36</sup> To an extent, the bibliomemoirs’ portrayal of academia overlooks ways that the expertise offered by theory-heavy and historically based scholarship does seek to “place books in the real world,” as Andy Miller says. It also neglects the full range of scholarship today. As I argue in Chapter Three, scholarly debates about reading attend less than they might to the multi-dimensional factors involved in how readers access texts, including their physical interactions with books in the process of selecting them. But scholars have grappled with what kinds of information they themselves should provide and with the affective experience that ensues for their readers. Especially in the twenty-first century, they have debated about their roles as “experts” in informing “non-expert” readers about literature, have themselves experimented with a blend of methods for contextualizing literature, and have seriously considered the effects of their scholarship beyond university settings. Among other questions, this strand of the debate asks, Are professional critics responsible for facilitating readers’ emotional responses to texts? If they take on this responsibility, what role should scholars’ theoretical, historical, biographical, and aesthetic knowledge play in bringing out those responses? And to what extent should scholars’ own personal relationships with texts be manifested in their guidance of readers?

As a few examples demonstrate, many literary scholars are invested in accessing texts’ rich meaning, in connecting emotionally with texts, and often, in helping readers to do so, too. For instance, in his discussion of historicist scholarship, Kucich does reject the notion of scholarly expertise being put to mere “belletristic” ends, arguing that historicizing is necessary to keep “humanistic interpretation” from being “superfluous,” from “merely register[ing] what is there for all to see.”<sup>37</sup> But he also rejects the notion that scholarly expertise is indeed “adversarial and arcane.” Kucich points out that at its best, the type of expertise Dyer despises—that borne of systematic

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<sup>36</sup> Kucich, “The Unfinished Historicist Project: In Praise of Suspicion,” *Victoriographies*, 73.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

textual examinations and “Research! Research!”—can work toward an affective end, if a limited one. “Historical and cultural contextualization,” and the against-the-grain interpretations that “a situated understanding of a text’s cultural difference” often produces, he insists, foster “sympathetic understanding across temporal barriers” and a diachronic perspective of history, in which modern concerns can be better understood through the past.<sup>38</sup>

In her recent analysis of the role of love in the study of literature, Deidre Lynch similarly complicates the stereotype of the scholar whose carefully guarded expertise forbids emotional investment in books, though from a different angle. She asserts that English scholarship has long been characterized by a doubleness, in which scholars are at once expected to be experts and to avoid the “affective deformation” that supposedly accompanies “theory and historical contexts.”<sup>39</sup> But as Lynch argues, scholarly context of the type Kucich describes can actually be at the heart of scholars’ love of literature. She identifies a lost history of literary studies (retroactively overlooked by an aesthetics that privileges Kant) in which literary appreciation, admiration, and feeling were once overtly identified as skills to be learned by specialist readers bringing context to readers.<sup>40</sup> Historicizing literature into finely distinguished periods was a means of coming to love literature intimately through one’s interpretive acts.<sup>41</sup> In this sense, what appears to be detached study is undergirded by a certain kind of passion, which, while it may not help scholars’ readers to see the relevance of literature in their personal lives, certainly makes literature emotionally resonant for scholars themselves.

Other scholars and teachers put more weight on the affective experience of readers as an end in itself. Such professionals are both less pessimistic about what Kucich calls the unchangeable “anti-belletristic tide of the general culture” and, like many bibliomemoirists, concerned that when

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>39</sup> Lynch, *Loving Literature: A Cultural History*, 4.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 8-12, 165.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 69.

over-privileged, some kinds of information provided by experts might put barriers between readers and texts.”<sup>42</sup> They embrace the ways that readers, in Michael Warner’s words, “read in all the ways they aren’t supposed to,” including many reading modes that Mead is also guilty of: identifying with characters, falling in love with authors, being reassured by the familiar.<sup>43</sup> And further, they consider it one role of literary experts to examine, draw out, and build upon the ways readers connect emotionally with texts, even when, and sometimes exactly when, readers remain uninformed about a text’s historical context or various theoretical readings of it. Rita Felski, for instance, argues that historicism’s emphasis on periodization as a paradigm for literary analysis falsely treats history like a “box” in which a contained set of conditions give a text meaning.<sup>44</sup> Drawing on Bruno Latour’s actor-network theory, she advocates that scholars take a more individualized view of what gives texts meaning to readers through “transtemporal connection and comparison,” suggesting that what makes a person love a work of art usually has more to do with the specific factors involved in their engagement with it than with a broadly understood “context” that determines meaning.<sup>45</sup> The “significance of a text” should include “what it makes possible in the viewer or reader—what kind of emotions it elicits, what perceptual changes it triggers, what affective bonds it calls into being.”<sup>46</sup>

One Victorianist, Philip Davis, takes the acknowledgement of affective meaning to a rather extreme position, arguing, in the vein of bibliotherapy, that the primary understanding readers should develop from texts is a better understanding of their own lives, and with that, the ability to use literary texts to resolve personal problems and interior conflicts.<sup>47</sup> The “Victorian,” he suggests,

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<sup>42</sup> Kucich, “The Unfinished Historicist Project,” 75.

<sup>43</sup> Warner, “Uncritical Reading,” 13.

<sup>44</sup> Felski, “Context Stinks!”, 574-75.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 580-83.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 585.

<sup>47</sup> With origins in medical practice and in libraries in the early twentieth century, bibliotherapy today might be considered less a cohesive theory or practice of reading than a certain attitude toward reading—a belief that books can help readers resolve personal problems and come to a better understanding of their own lives—that is applied in different ways. On the origins of bibliotherapy, see, for example, Pierce, “A Feeling for Books: Therapeutic Connections to Library

is “not something to be anxiously learnt, a reassuring body of knowledge to be known, inertly, as context and background [or as] a receptacle of cultural and historical meaning. ‘Victorian’ [is] rather . . . a way of thinking and feeling.”<sup>48</sup> In the book that these statements introduce, Davis shares what his lifelong professional study of Victorian literature has taught him, not about the Victorians especially, but about what he has come to see as life truths, such as the nature of belief.

Other professors deliberately nurture students’ ability to see themselves in a text and to respond emotionally to it, not necessarily to help them solve their problems, but to help them become better readers and writers. Peter Elbow, for example, points out that literary scholars are sometimes so eager to teach students to read “against the grain” that they fail to realize that students may struggle to read “*with* the grain.”<sup>49</sup> Before students can do anything meaningful with a text, he argues, they “need help learning how to enter into mentalities and experience points of view different from their own.” He suggests they do so by reading with “involvement,” and by tapping into “their lives and what’s on their minds” when they read. Like Felski, creative writer and English professor Dean Bakopoulous, who uses literature as a model to teach creative writing, is dismissive of what he calls “background” information as a hermeneutic. He argues that “reading like a writer”—which includes paying attention to where one is moved by a text’s sentence structure, word choice, and imagery—“provides a ground floor for any student [and is] a less intimidating approach to literature.”<sup>50</sup> While these academics consider themselves to be experts as critics and teachers, they define their expertise less through historical or theoretical knowledge and more through the ability to see how textual readings might be informed in the *act* of reading. Although extra-textual elements that shape meaning may include information like a text’s historical context, such elements also

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Practice,” 48; Rubin, “‘Feeling for Books’ Misleads,” 7; and Wolpov and Askov, “Widened Frameworks and Practice: From Bibliotherapy to the Literacy of Testimony and Witness,” 606-09.

<sup>48</sup> Davis, *Why Victorian Literature Still Matters*, 2.

<sup>49</sup> Elbow, “The Cultures of Literature and Composition,” 471-72.

<sup>50</sup> Bakopoulous, “Straight Through the Heart,” *The New York Times*, 22 Mar. 2013.

always include the reader engaging with the text in the moment. In this strategy, scholars and teachers may bring knowledge to readers, but they also attempt to draw new knowledge from their students' or other readers' responses to a book.<sup>51</sup>

Another angle in the academic discussion of expertise and affect that is relevant to the bibliomemoir focuses on whether and how to make the emotive investments that prompt scholarly study more evident in scholarly writing, reinforcing Lynch's point about the porousness between the affective and the professional. This subset of academic thought emphasizes that scholars' feelings, their bodies, and their material engagement with the subjects they study are always already entangled in the way they read—that if scholars are experts on a topic, that expertise is pre-filtered by the scholar as a person with interests, biases, feelings. If such personal context—even if it is only manifest in a love of one's work or one's subject matter—fuels historicist and theoretical literary analyses that do not presently prioritize affective response, how might such context be accounted for in published materials, in such a way as to reduce the affective distance scholarship creates for readers? One possibility is simply to include more self-reflection in scholarly writing, or at least, as Eve Sedgwick has suggested, to acknowledge broadly within academic culture that even the detached, suspicious reading often associated with historicism is its own affective mode.<sup>52</sup>

Specifically regarding historical and archival research, some have argued that scholars would benefit from better accounting for their embodied research processes and their effect on the conclusions of scholarly work. In their 2008 collection *Beyond the Archives*, for instance, editors Gesa Kirsch and Liz Rohan argue that the personal interest and sensory learning that often drive scholars' archival research is too often evacuated from scholarly publication, and that scholars are too often dismissive of “archives” beyond formal libraries, where scholars may interact with source material in ways that

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<sup>51</sup> In this Felski and Bakopoulou are situated adjacent to a tradition of reader studies established and advocated by scholars like Janice Radway, Kate Flint, Elizabeth McHenry, and many others.

<sup>52</sup> Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You,” 133-36.

extend beyond sitting at desks reading books. Although scholars' conclusions are greatly shaped by the physical experiences of the researcher in the archive and the intersection of the personal and the professional, they point out, conventions dictate that those experiences themselves often be excised from published work and even that scholars themselves attempt to disregard their personal motivations for visiting archives.<sup>53</sup> In this view, making explicit the personal investment that shapes research and analysis enhances both the accuracy and the depth of scholars' presentations of their findings. The essays in *Beyond the Archives* are examples of scholars doing such work.

Working at different institutions, within different areas of specialty, and occupying different positions about the exact relationship between texts, extra-textual information, and emotional experiences with texts, these scholars present less of a unified perspective than the bibliomemoirists I have surveyed. Yet, this small sampling of scholars shows that some academic literary criticism today is not thoroughly removed, or at least not deliberately removed, from lay readers and their desires to integrate books into their lives. As academia is increasingly held accountable to broader readerships for explaining and justifying humanistic scholarship, attention to the role of the expert in guiding reading is likely to be amplified. In the face of budget cuts and a reimagining of the university's purpose, literary scholars risk being seen by "outsiders" as outdated, elitist gatekeepers of knowledge, much like the cultured secondhand bookseller of the Victorian period; bibliomemoirists' wariness of scholarship is evidence of this trend. As Sidonie Smith argues in her 2015 *Manifesto for the Humanities*, to meet these challenges at its door, a "21<sup>st</sup>-century vision" of the humanities must be "energized by multiple reading strategies" and "motivated by engagement beyond the academy."<sup>54</sup> Whether that engagement occurs by showing readers how rigorous historicizing or theorizing *does* connect texts to readers' lives or by validating readers' emotions as part of meaning-making, an opportunity clearly exists in academia for scholars to continue

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<sup>53</sup> Kirsch and Rohan, *Beyond the Archives: Research As a Lived Process*, 2.

<sup>54</sup> Smith, *Manifesto for the Humanities: Transforming Doctoral Education in Good Enough Times*, 2015.

addressing concerns about criticism as excessively esoteric, though it may be unlikely that scholars will reach a final consensus about the appropriate role of academic expertise.

Rather than outsiders to academia, then, bibliomemoirists can be described as participants in a conversation also ongoing within academia about expert guidance, participants who simply come down on one end of a spectrum. In underemphasizing their reliance on literary criticism, and in oversimplifying literary criticism in their reflections on academia, bibliomemoirists might best be characterized as performing a sometimes-lighthearted, sometimes-earnest rhetorical move in their treatment of professional expertise. The writers paint academia's detachment with a broad brush, in order to accentuate their commitment to foregrounding the personal and the affective. It may not be objectively accurate or generous, but like the work of many of the academics I discuss above, this trope in the bibliomemoir does highlight a very real disconnect that some students and readers of literary criticism experience when their reading is mediated by certain academic experts, of the past and present. Despite their oft-unstated similarity to academic scholarship, bibliomemoirs still offer a stimulating contrast to professional literary criticism. Bibliomemoirists have a broader audience, freedom from the academic conventions designed to ensure rigor (such as peer review and footnotes), and a more single-minded intent to explore their emotional relationships with texts. As such, bibliomemoirists generally push their personal connection with texts further than do academics, indulge in less grounded interpretation, and more liberally weave together different modes of writing and types of information about texts in the service of guiding readers to forge their own relationships with books. At once overlapping with, adjacent to, and opposed to academic literary criticism, the type of guidance offered by the bibliomemoir—in both its proclaimed nature and its actual characteristics—serves as a useful window on academic expertise, and vice versa.

In addition to offering insight into how readers read specifically Victorian literature today, *My Life in Middlemarch* is a fitting focus for this chapter because of the especially intricate relationship

Mead establishes between expertise and readers' positive identification with texts. Among bibliomemoirs, *My Life in Middlemarch* stands a little apart for its almost entirely loving treatment of its subject. As Oates expresses in her review of the book, Mead writes a "beguilingly straightforward, resolutely orthodox and unshowy account of [her] lifelong admiration for George Eliot and for *Middlemarch*," which is exemplified for Oates by Mead's "immediate and unqualified" identification with some of Eliot's characters, notably Dorothea Brooke.<sup>55</sup> Oates critiques Mead, in fact, for her failure to "establish [her own] voice in counterpoint to the subject," as she believes the best bibliomemoirs do. While Oates's distaste for Mead's style seems based on personal preferences, she is accurate in her observation that Mead's "immediate and unqualified" identification with her subject is notable in the genre. Other bibliomemoirs seek to explore a personal and emotional connection with books, but that relationship is as often one of frustration and a sense of difference as of kinship, which is true of Dyer's and Baker's somewhat ironic depictions of Lawrence and Updike, respectively. Mead, by contrast, strives to depict not just a personal relationship with her subject, but a trusting relationship, in which Eliot and *Middlemarch* serve as models for her own life, and as models for her readers' lives. As is suggested by Mead's assertion that Eliot in *Middlemarch* "spoke with an authority and a generosity that was wise and essential and profound," Mead has strong faith in Eliot's discourses on the meaning of life and the nature of reality. In her bibliomemoir, she is not only showing "how reading shapes our lives, and our lives shape reading," but how reading this book creates a chiefly affirmative bond, legitimizing the positive affects—admiration or love, trust, catharsis—one can experience from identifying with books. It is therefore especially important that in providing information as an expert on Eliot and *Middlemarch*, Mead nevertheless avoid making her subject seem like something that can be known only by an expert reader, or only by herself.

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<sup>55</sup> See Oates, "Rebecca Mead's 'My Life in *Middlemarch*,'" *The New York Times*, 23 Jan. 2014.



In what follows, I explicate how Mead attempts to mediate Eliot and *Middlemarch* for readers without being an obtrusive expert. I look in particular at two different but complementary strategies. First, I analyze how Mead describes her own identification with *Middlemarch* and with Eliot, a type of extra-textual information she offers that is drawn from her life rather than from research, and a type of expertise grounded in her having read and reread the novel so many times and so passionately. I suggest that in portraying how she applies the novel to her life, Mead at once foregrounds and deemphasizes the specificity of her own relationship with the subject, modeling identification for readers even while leaving space for them to identify. Second, I analyze how Mead uses information from her research—information that has the potential to distance readers by being available only through scholarly research processes and by drawing out the historical particularity of *Middlemarch*—to instead strengthen the sense of immediacy between readers, herself, Eliot, and the novel.

### **Universalized identification**

In narrating how she identifies with Eliot and with *Middlemarch*, Mead often layers comparisons for a sophisticated aesthetic effect: the parallels she draws between herself, her subject, and her readers potentially open the reader's mind to *Middlemarch*'s therapeutic and instructive capacities. Critically, these parallels are also restrained in the assumptions they suggest about readers, in order to invite rather than preclude readers' own identification with the text. Further, to support readers' identification, Mead theorizes a relationship between truth and fiction that encourages readers to place themselves in fictional worlds, regardless of the differences between that world and their own. Although *My Life in Middlemarch* lacks the rigor and historical insight of a more detached, research-based approach, the book thus models how one might *teach* readers to have and recognize, in Felski's words, "emotion," "perceptual changes," and "affective bonds" in reading a novel. Mead's approach indicates what an expert reader who focuses on affective reading experiences might have to offer to a lay reader, in response to critics like Kucich, who are skeptical that a focus

on readers' emotional responses is worthy of instructors' attention or adds anything to readers' experiences that they could not get on their own.

When Mead relates her own life to *Middlemarch* and to Eliot's life, she often does so through imaginative projection, using her experiences to make conclusions about Eliot's experiences and those of her characters, and vice versa. For instance, in reflecting on letters to Eliot from Eliot's stepson Thornton Lewes, Mead quite confidently asserts that she knows how Eliot would have felt in reading the boisterous Thornton's words, based on her own experience of meeting and then helping to raise boisterous stepsons: "I feel sure," she writes,

that Eliot felt a degree of disorientation as she absorbed this material. She was in her midthirties, and before she met Lewes she had probably expected to remain childless. . . . [Yet,] long before she heard heavy footsteps clattering up and down her staircase, or listened patiently to indefatigable accounts of various armaments and their uses, or caught the sweet but slightly rank scent of a young head of hair that has gone too many days without washing, she had imaginary children, boys she had begun to try to love before they knew she was in the world.<sup>56</sup>

If there is any evidence from Eliot's correspondence that she ever actually "caught the sweet but slightly rank scent" of unwashed boys' hair, Mead does not share it here. Instead, Mead presumably allows her own sensory experiences with having young boys in her house to stand in for Eliot's, apparently guessing that her stepsons and Eliot's would share enough commonality to make hers and Eliot's stepmother-hood also comparable. Mead makes a similar move in presuming Eliot's thoughts when asserting that Eliot based Casaubon on Mark Pattison. She notes, after a visit to the house where Eliot once visited Pattison and his young wife, that having "walked the streets Eliot walked, and read the diaries and letters she wrote" in an effort "to enter sympathetically and imaginatively into her experience," "it seems . . . impossible to conceive that when [Eliot] began writing a story about the passionate young woman and a much older scholar, she did not have the

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<sup>56</sup> Mead, *My Life in Middlemarch*, 80-81.

Rector of Lincoln and his wife somewhere in mind.”<sup>57</sup> Again, the evidence that Eliot perceived someone in a particular way derives not from an analysis of Eliot’s writings or historical context from others’ writings, but from an analysis of Eliot’s experience re-lived by Mead, at great historical distance. Mead’s expressed certainty about Eliot’s state of mind—that it is “impossible to conceive” that Casaubon was not based on Pattison—sets her work apart from more conventional academic scholarship, which would more likely frame conclusions about Casaubon’s real-life counterpart as somewhat speculative.

While she grounds her analysis of Eliot and *Middlemarch* in quite subjective evidence, at many moments of *My Life in Middlemarch* Mead universalizes those impressions and invites the reader to share them. The structure of comparison that she uses in such cases casts a wide net, becoming at times so inclusive as to make it nearly impossible for a reader *not* to identify: *My Life in Middlemarch* slides into *Our Lives in Middlemarch*. When Mead articulates her teenage interest in the novel, for instance, she begins by asserting that “the questions with which George Eliot showed her characters wrestling would all be mine eventually.”<sup>58</sup> But when she actually lists the questions, it is clear that they are those that, in one form or another, strike *most* people, eventually: “How is wisdom to be attained? What are the satisfactions of personal ambition, and how might they be weighed against ties and duties to others? What does a good marriage consist of, and what makes a bad one? What do the young owe to the old, and vice versa? What is the proper foundation of morality?”

As Mead draws parallels between more particular events in Eliot’s life or moments in her writing, she often similarly guides readers from the specific—what the text says and what it means to her—to the general, how many readers might identify with the text in the same way, substituting names and pronouns in a series of assertions to align Eliot, Eliot’s characters, herself, and readers

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 4.

with each other. Consider, for example, the layers in Mead's defensive analysis of the oft-observed pretentiousness in Eliot's youthful letters:

[The letters] were written out of passion and exuberance and boredom and ostentation, and her desire to discover what she was thinking by putting it on the page—which is to say they are letters written by a young woman who is trying to work out who she is, and where she is going. The raw season in which I sat on my narrow childhood bed, propped up on pillows and reading *Middlemarch* for the first time, I also spent many hours writing letters to a cousin of more or less my own age. And if my teenage correspondence was much less learned than George Eliot's, the letters I wrote were no less painfully self-exposing, filled with the enthusiasm and obliviousness and unearned world-weariness of youth. . . . And so the letters that George Eliot wrote when she was Dorothea Brooke's age move me because of their dreadfulness, not in spite of it.<sup>59</sup>

Moving from Eliot ("she") as an ambitious but inhibited person to a generalized "young woman" searching for an identity, to Mead's "I," writing pretentious letters as a teenager, and back to "George Eliot" at the age of "Dorothea Brooke," this account fluently strings together the experience of fictional and real people in a manner that also invokes readers who have been either youthful and/or women to identify, which surely comprises a large percentage of Mead's readers. As one more example among many, Mead repeats this structure in analyzing the theme of loneliness in *Middlemarch* and Eliot's life, writing of (and again, attempting to salvage) Eliot's unrequited romantic feelings for Herbert Spencer: "Her experience with Spencer informed her understanding. He was part of her education, as Dorothea was part of Lydgate's understanding, as all our loves, realized or otherwise—all our alternative plots—go on to make us who we are, and become part of what we make."<sup>60</sup> The parallel phrases, relating Spencer's role in Eliot's life to Dorothea's in Lydgate's and to the role of "all our loves" in all our lives, brings together mostly unlike things—Herbert Spencer here is comparable to Dorothea.

Mead contrasts her method of interpretation in such moments to scholarly methods, and to some extent she confesses the inadequacy of her evidence in comparison to scholarly projects. As

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 27, 29.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 142.

she writes, “Such an approach to fiction—where do I see myself in here?—is not how a scholar reads, and it can be limiting in its solipsism. It’s hardly an enlarging experience to read a novel as if it were a mirror of oneself. One of the useful functions of literary criticism and scholarship is to suggest alternative lenses through which a book might be read.”<sup>61</sup> Mead suggests that her subjective approach might fail to “enlarge” Eliot or *Middlemarch* for either herself or readers; she also suggests that scholars do not look for themselves in books.

Compared with some of the scholarship published during the eras against which Mead reacts in her characterization of scholarship broadly, Mead’s solipsism is starkly manifest. In situating Eliot among other authors and preoccupations of the Victorian period, and in denying that Eliot can be understood without that expert knowledge, such scholarship illuminates what Mead is referencing when she writes of “alternative lenses” beyond the reader that enlarge understanding. Mead, for example, believes strongly in Eliot’s individuality as a writer and identifies with the specifics of her life, including her provincial background. In his analysis of Eliot’s apparent wisdom as an individual, however, Daniel Cottom analyzes her work in the context of a larger movement of liberal intellectuals in the nineteenth century, to conclude that what appears to be Eliot’s impartial, experienced, impervious, prophetic voice is in reality a rhetorical mode of the Victorian intellectuals, part of a “fable” constructed by ascending middle-class thinkers that all truth could be achieved by (their) reason.<sup>62</sup> Far from seeing Eliot as an individual, Cottom argues that Eliot “thought herself out of a provincial . . . girlhood and into a position in which . . . she wrote only nominally as an individual.”<sup>63</sup>

Likewise, where Mead analyzes characters partly based on the attributes she believes she shares with them, those characters look quite different when examined in historical and discursive

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 172-73.

<sup>62</sup> Cottom, *Social Figures: George Eliot, Social History, and Literary Representation*, 5-6.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 3.

context. For instance, when Mead examines the conflicts of each character in the novel—Lydgate’s ambition, Dorothea’s naiveté, and so forth—she reads the inner conflicts of each character as timeless and still experienced today, as they are experienced by her. Terry Eagleton, by contrast, frames Eliot’s characters as caught in a conflict between the ideologies of Romantic individualism and the corporate social laws to which individuals were compelled to conform.<sup>64</sup> This framework leads him to dismantle the totalizing, historically specific ideologies he believes *Middlemarch* attempts to present in its characters (Casaubon representing idealism; Bulstrode, Christian Evangelicalism; Lydgate, scientific rationalism; and Dorothea, Romantic self-achievement).<sup>65</sup>

In a work of biographical criticism like Rosemarie Bodenheimer’s, identification also takes a back seat to the historical situatedness of a work. Insisting on the impenetrability of Eliot’s “real” life, one way that Bodenheimer keeps from taking Eliot at her word is to examine her writing in the context of other writings of the period, much as do Cottom and Eagleton. Thus, where Mead sees the affectation of Eliot’s letters as representative of a universal tendency of youth to be affected, Bodenheimer analyzes conduct books from the era and attributes Eliot’s formality to the Victorian context in which she wrote, and to the conventions that framed female letters as a source of potential indiscretion, vanity, and the violation of privacy.<sup>66</sup>

As with bibliomemoirs more broadly, however, Mead somewhat exaggerates the impersonality of scholarship, especially more recent scholarship, which sometimes does rely on subjective experience and does look for mirror images between texts and the reader’s reality. At the same time, taken as a question of degree rather than of kind, Mead’s identification reaches further than most contemporary scholars’ and could therefore still fairly be termed “solipsistic.” For example, in the introduction to *Middlemarch in the Twenty-First Century* (2006), a collection of scholarly

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<sup>64</sup> Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory*, 111.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>66</sup> Bodenheimer, *The Real Life of Mary Ann Evans*, 24.

essays about the novel, the editor Karen Chase asserts the relevance of *Middlemarch* for readers today: through scholarly analysis performed by each generation, she suggests, the novel “will continue to exert a pressure on the twenty-first century as vitally as it did in its nineteenth and our twentieth centuries.”<sup>67</sup> She notes that the readings make meaning of *Middlemarch* through both a consideration of its nineteenth-century setting and “the aesthetic, ethical, and social concerns” of the present. While Chase describes the presentism of the scholarship in general terms, in some of the essays the “concerns” of the present become quite specific to individuals and their affective experiences in reading. For instance, in an against-the-grain reading of Dorothea, Nina Auerbach outlines how she identifies with Casaubon, who usually inspires repulsion, in part because she, like Casaubon, is a scholar, and in part because Dorothea annoys her by rejecting two things Auerbach loves, family jewels and dogs. “No doubt my irritation at Dorothea is subjective, at least as far as jewels and dogs are concerned,” she acknowledges, “but it pervades my reading of the novel and deepens my appreciation of its sometimes duplicitous subtlety.”<sup>68</sup> Auerbach shows herself to be aware of looking for herself in the novel, and, contrary to the accusations many bibliomemoirists make about scholars’ obscure language and overly serious tone, to be having a little fun.

However, within the collection, Auerbach’s essay is fairly exceptional for grounding analysis in emotional reactions—and although Auerbach starts with her reaction, she also delves into a textual analysis of Eliot’s representation of Dorothea, apart from her feelings about Dorothea, to substantiate her claims. Most of the essays connect Eliot and *Middlemarch* to the *collective* “aesthetic, ethical, and social” issues of our day. Consider, for instance, J. Hillis Miller’s language in analyzing *Middlemarch*’s use of generalizations: “*Middlemarch*, in deconstructing the characters’ possibilities of verifiable knowledge, implicitly deconstructs also both its own power to make an orderly narrative

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<sup>67</sup> Chase, *Middlemarch in the Twenty-First Century*, 3-4.

<sup>68</sup> Auerbach, “Dorothea’s Lost Dog,” Chase, 90.

and the reader's power to comprehend the novel integrally."<sup>69</sup> Here, Miller is concerned with "the reader's power to comprehend," a phrase which gestures to "my" power to comprehend—but as Miller's own reading experiences are not detailed in the essay, there remains a level of remove between Miller as reader and "the reader." Similarly, in her analysis of the print culture surrounding *Middlemarch*'s original publication, which brings forth new elements in the novel, Gillian Beer suggests that "we" readers find new insights when reading with contextual information in mind: "We shall always be tracking, dramatizing, and uncovering features that lay latent for earlier readers. We shall also be missing much that would have been manifest to them."<sup>70</sup> As in Miller's reference to "the reader," Beer's "we" both asserts that the text has meaning to real people in the real world, and refrains from personalizing that meaning. Taken literally, then, Mead's question—"where do I see *myself* in here?"—does set her approach apart from the general tenor of this scholarship.

When set beside Mead's version of mediating Eliot and *Middlemarch*, this scholarship shows what is lost by basing textual readings in the reader alone. It suggests that the more one views a text as a system, as Miller does in reading the novel's generalizations, or the more one knows of a text's original context, as Beer shows in her analysis of advertisements surrounding *Middlemarch*, the more one is compelled to take a step back from the author and the text, to be circumspect, if not suspicious, about how someone else's life and writing speaks to oneself. In drawing her conclusions about Eliot and *Middlemarch* from what resonates with her, often with little more than assertion, Mead risks making her readings too specific to herself, obscuring these other readings. From another point of view, in beckoning all readers to also identify, Mead risks being entirely too *unspecific* in her reading, turning Eliot, her work, and her readers into trite conventionalities. Both possibilities hover throughout *My Life in Middlemarch*, and by Mead's own admission.

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<sup>69</sup> J. Hillis Miller, "A Conclusion in Which Almost Nothing Is Concluded: *Middlemarch*'s Finale," Chase, 138.

<sup>70</sup> Beer, "What's Not in *Middlemarch*," Chase, 16.



And yet, despite this reality, Mead argues that her method is inevitable and necessary: as she points out in the same passage in which she confesses her solipsism, “all readers make books over in their own image, and according to their own experience.” Setting aside one kind of “enlarging” reading that she is not doing—the type of reading done by Eagleton, Bodenheimer, or Beer—Mead implies that identification accomplishes its own kind of enlargement. “[Identification] is where part of the pleasure, and the urgency, of reading lies,” she claims: “It is one of the ways that a novel speaks to a reader, and becomes integrated into the reader’s own imaginative life. Even the most sophisticated readers read novels in the light of their own experience, and in such recognition, sympathy may begin.” Mead here explains what she gains from identifying with *Middlemarch*, its integration into her imagination. She does not explicate how narrating her own identification with the novel is enlarging for her readers. However, I suggest that one of the reasons the book has been successful in turning at least some readers to *Middlemarch* is Mead’s ability, in many moments, to model such identification, by avoiding both too-specific and too-broad comparisons. In these passages, she offers readers enough concrete detail on which to see themselves in the novel and the author’s biography, but she does not mediate the comparison so much as to entirely replace the reader in the identification process. Hovering between solipsism and vagueness, she creates a space for her reader to occupy.

Mead gestures toward the “middleness” of her identification, suggesting that “my *Middlemarch* is not the same as anyone else’s *Middlemarch*; it is not even the same as my *Middlemarch* of twenty-five years ago.”<sup>71</sup> This statement compels a reconsideration of the comparisons she draws between text, author, and reader, enveloped as this quote is in comparisons that, as I have discussed, sinuously link herself to everyone and everything. It is at first glance surprising that Mead would assert that her “*Middlemarch* is not the same as anyone else’s *Middlemarch*”—what else does she mean

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<sup>71</sup> Mead, *My Life in Middlemarch*, 172-73.

by suggesting that “all our loves” resemble that between Spencer and Eliot, or that we can all relate to Eliot’s/Dorothea’s/her own desire to rise out of a provincial youth? It is possible to somewhat resolve this apparent contradiction by considering the distinction this passage draws between the content of identification and the process of identification. Mead suggests that everyone gets something different out of *Middlemarch*, that we all have our “own” *Middlemarch*, but that we are all nevertheless united in the impulse and the need to identify with the novel, and with fiction generally. Here, she puts stress on the structure of identification—the act of “reading in the light of our own experience”—as the common element of reading, whereas the solipsism of reading emerges in the outcome, what the reader very specifically takes from the text. Interpretation through identification is in this way at once shared and individualistic, broad and specific, homogenizing and diverse.

In light of this framework, Mead’s own broad comparisons can be viewed as strategic invitations for multiplicities of identification around a theme, rather than as an act of forming other readers in her own image or of emptying the text of all specificity. Note, for instance, that in articulating the relevant questions that *Middlemarch* poses—about the acquisition of wisdom, the balance between personal ambition and duty, the nature of a good marriage—Mead offers few direct, encompassing answers, instead emphasizing the commonality of pressing concerns. The insistent openness and broadness of the questions incite response, but Mead leaves room for readers to take what is useful from their reading of Eliot and of Mead in forming that response. A reader’s version of “wisdom,” for example, might be different from Mead’s, from Eliot’s, and from Eliot’s characters. But phrasing the attainment of wisdom as a universally perplexing matter prompts readers to consider first what wisdom means to Mead and Eliot, then what wisdom means to them, and then again, as they read more about Eliot from Mead’s point of view, how those notions of wisdom resonate with or are stretched by what they encounter in *My Life in Middlemarch*. Mead’s broad comparisons in this instance function as primers, rather than as ends in themselves.

In her more direct comparisons, Mead's maneuvering between first- and third-person pronouns, and her switching back and forth between the general and specific, may also be read as a simultaneous assertion of similarity that, over the course of a sentence or a paragraph, gradually loosens the comparison to its broadest form, emphasizing the structure of comparison over its substance. Consider, for example, the subtle shifts in Mead's statement that Spencer "was part of [Eliot's] education, as Dorothea was part of Lydgate's understanding, as all our loves, realized or otherwise—all our alternative plots—go on to make us who we are, and become part of what we make." Mead asserts that Spencer's romantic involvement influenced Eliot's "education"; when we move to Dorothea and Lydgate, we move from a relationship of exclusive romance to something more like a non-exclusive friendship, and the influence on "education" changes to an influence on the broader notion of "understanding"; the third shift opens up romance and friendship to any relationship involving love, and it reframes influence from affecting specifically our education or our understanding to the much more comprehensive idea of "who we are" and "what we make."

To be sure, a solipsistic mapping of readers and texts is occurring here, as Mead is partly inspired by her own failed romances to glean something useful for us all about the "Spencers" in our lives. Mead's final categories of comparison—education, understanding, then "who we are"—are also extremely broad, threatening to be meaningless because they are so unspecific. But Mead stops short both of *closely* mapping her own or characters' or readers' lives onto Eliot's, and of *only* making broad statements about who influences "who we are": readers are free to consider whichever type of relationship and whichever type of effect they like, but they are also encouraged to ground their view of the relationship in Mead's anecdotes about Spencer and Eliot. We are to sympathize through making single, concrete, perhaps creatively formed connections between one person's experience and others'—here, recognizing that every relationship changes us, as Spencer changed Eliot—but not to assume that "all our loves" are actually identical to Eliot and Spencer's relationship, or to

Dorothea's and Lydgate's. Mead's structure of comparison facilitates sympathy with the author and with her characters without foreclosing the possibility of differences among the experiences of author, character, and reader. It invites readers to reflect on their own lives in ways that Mead's text cannot overly control or delimit. While Mead does not illuminate texts or authors in their historical particularity, she also does not necessarily foreclose such readings done by scholars. It is conceivable, for example, that Eliot's pretentious teenage letters were the combined result of the Victorian codes of letter-writing Bodenheimer researches and the more timeless nature of ambitious youth. It is also possible to imagine that the prophetic tone Eliot adopts in her novels could be a Victorian, class-based rhetorical strategy and at the same time, evidence of an intelligent, experienced individual.

Using her own expertise as an avid reader of *Middlemarch*, Mead offers an "alternative lens" for readers in the sense that she prompts their identification. Further, in arguing that identification is where "sympathy may begin" between reader and novel, reader and reader, Mead elevates identification into a possibly ethical endeavor. She attempts to do in the bibliomemoir what Elbow suggests teachers should do in the classroom, helping readers read with "involvement" and with their own lives as context. Elbow argues that reading with involvement allows readers to see a text, even a text that expresses new ideas, more clearly and openly. Initial identification is the foundation of readers' ability to then "enter into mentalities and experience points of view different from their own." As Mead similarly asserts, with readers' "recognition" of the similarity between a text and their experience, "sympathy" with others "may begin." The "may" in Mead's phrase "may begin" is of course important. Identifying with a book could foreclose rather than facilitate a reader's sympathy with others, if a reader remains temperamentally disinclined to sympathize with anything in a text other than its immediately recognizable similarity to him- or herself, and instead merely projects onto or colonizes the text. But in her rendering of identification, Mead retains at least the possibility that a reader's viewpoint might be expanded beyond the narrow confines of the self. She

suggests that as readers make the book over in their own image, the book also develops its own power, beginning to “speak to” and become “integrated into” readers’ lives, thereby encouraging readers to adopt perspectives or experience feelings that their prior experiences alone may not have afforded. As Mead indicates, it is only by being invited into a reader’s life to begin with that a text has even a chance to nurture the reader’s sympathy with other lives. The enlargement offered by Mead’s alternative lens is thus both an enlargement of readers’ personal relationship to *Middlemarch* and Eliot, and the possible enlargement of readers’ sympathy towards experiences different from their own.

In the moments I have been discussing, *My Life in Middlemarch* gives readers license to privilege a different kind of evidence in the service of identifying with the text, compared with the types of evidence prominent in the scholarship I have surveyed. Rather than looking primarily to print culture sources, Victorian philosophies, or small details in the text of *Middlemarch* to support conclusions made about Eliot and her work, Mead justifies her interpretations based on their outcome in her life. In these terms, the provability of one’s interpretation of Eliot’s writing becomes largely a matter of its usefulness for each reader’s life, the most relevant context being the reader rather than extraneous information known only through research. When it comes to evaluating an interpretation, the question for Mead is not so much, Is it right from all possible viewpoints?, but rather, Does interpreting the text out of your life experience, and applying what you learn from the text to your life experience, bring new realizations about yourself, help you navigate life decisions, and generally improve your life, from your own perspective?

To validate this type of evidence, Mead theorizes a symbiotic relationship between text and reader that conflates reality with fiction. “There are books,” she writes, “that seem to comprehend us just as much as we understand them, or even more. There are books that grow with the reader as

the reader grows, like a graft to a tree.”<sup>72</sup> The interpreter and the interpreted in this construction are interchangeable, and the book/reader relationship is vague as a result. In suggesting that books “comprehend” the reader, Mead indicates that books interpret the lives of readers; yet, in other ways her language—books “grow with the reader as the reader grows”—leaves open the possibility that it is not just a reader’s *perception* of a book that matures over time, but that a book’s power to comprehend actually grows. Put another way, Mead seems to suggest that as a reader’s life develops, there are more possibilities through which he or she can read a fixed text, and thus, more meanings that can be bestowed *upon* a book, that did not inhere in the book before.

In the vein of reader-response theory, in this back-and-forth, the question of a book’s “objective” meaning and the danger of a reader’s being taken in by a book become irrelevant as the book’s meaning becomes relative to the reader. Rather than dwelling on whether fiction anticipates and reflects reality, or is shaped retrospectively by readers’ sense of their own reality, Mead questions whether a distinction between fiction and reality is meaningful to begin with. In a quest for identification, she at once sees the characters of *Middlemarch* as real and herself as fictional. She notes, for example, that when she “spend[s] time in [Dorothea’s] company,” she “remember[s] what it was like to be eighteen, and at the beginning of things.” While she describes Dorothea as though she were an actual person in whose “company” she can spend time, Mead also describes herself as a character: “I felt as if my life were an unread book—the thickest and most daunting of novels—that I was holding in my hands. I didn’t know what the story would be, or where it would lead, and I was almost too overawed to crack its spine and begin.”<sup>73</sup>

Scholars have noted the ways that realist fiction encourages such slipperiness. Analyzing the nature of characters’ reality in Eliot’s fiction, Catherine Gallagher has argued that in oscillating between presenting characters as types and individualizing them, and in ultimately highlighting the

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 43-44.

impossibility of being a “type,” Eliot not only makes her characters extremely real but gives readers a “*desire to be real*” themselves.<sup>74</sup> However, in her analysis of what makes fiction attractive to readers, Laura Green suggests the opposite possibility. Perhaps, she argues, “the desire of readers of novels in the broad tradition of fictional realism is less to imagine fictional characters as real than to mimic their state of fictional reality ourselves; not to invite them into our world, but to invite ourselves into theirs.”<sup>75</sup> Green suggests that this desire stems from our wish “to imagine ourselves as propelled . . . by an authorial design that would confer *significance* on the reality that, after all, we already possess, by making us part of a narrative that maintains the texture of the real but expresses intention and meaning rather than contingency and inconclusiveness.”<sup>76</sup>

It is in this sense that, for Mead, the authorial constructedness of a novel or even a letter is not something to be scandalously revealed or even carefully explicated, but assumed as part of the explicit contract between an author and a reader, in which making meaning rather than depicting the real is the purpose of the writing. In redefining Dorothea as a fictional character whose fictional nature she would like to mimic, in framing the novel as not only a book she comprehends but a book that comprehends her, Mead privileges not only the realness of *Middlemarch* in Gallagher’s sense but the urgency it expresses of the need to make a narrative out of life, to see life as made up of origin points and end points, trajectories and episodes, as though constructed by an author. By persisting in this vision of herself despite her knowledge that she is actually not an Eliot character—by making perceived meaning more important than reality—Mead justifies interpretive evidence based in experience and feeling.

Through her metaphor of novels growing like a graft to a tree, and through her examples of how *Middlemarch* has grown with her, Mead once again mediates readers’ identification with her

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<sup>74</sup> Gallagher, “George Eliot: Immanent Victorian,” 66.

<sup>75</sup> Green, “Wishing to Be Fictional,” 218.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

subject, by explaining and modeling how readers can use their own experience to relate to a novel. That Mead intends for her analogy and her experience to be applied generally is evident in the inclusive pronouns she uses to describe the relationship between a reader and a book: books “seem to comprehend *us* just as much as *we* understand them.” While Mead explains this relationship to readers, she also frames fiction rather than herself as the medium that interprets the reader’s life, and which the reader alone interprets, again articulating a structure of identification but leaving its particulars to the reader. As with the comparisons she draws between herself, her subject, and her readers, Mead does not prove that all books grow with all readers like a graft to a tree. Rather, in keeping with the conventions of a bibliomemoir, her guidance of reading takes the form of assertion, suggestion, personal example, and implicit invitation, leaving it to the individual reader to see—or, depending on the reader of course, to not see—the application of her theory in their lives, a mapping of her experiences onto theirs.

### **Reframing “distancing” information**

In Lucy Scholes’s rendering, the bibliomemoir is partly defined by its flexibility, the genre’s tendency to “bend itself to the individual author’s needs.” Mead is indeed flexible in the strategies she uses to establish parallels between reader and subject and to evoke sympathetic emotional responses in the reader toward Eliot and her work. Where she applies pure life experience and personal reflection to understand *Middlemarch* and Eliot in some cases, as in those discussed above, in other cases she relies on more traditional scholarly methods, such as archival research and engagement with primary sources, to explicate her topic. Accessing material outside of *Middlemarch* that her readers are unable or unlikely to engage with themselves, Mead risks putting herself in a privileged position in relation to the text, one that in its way mirrors the privilege of the exclusive, so-called “sophisticated” readers she found repellant at Oxford, only substituting historical knowledge in this case for theoretical prowess. By its nature, expertise inevitably informs non-



experts and holds information at a remove from them. If a scholar's relaying information from an archive may improve a reader's knowledge of a novel or an author, it may also flag for readers their own distance from the text: the very illumination that emerges from the archive emphasizes the fact that the lay reader outside the archive is at a disadvantage without the mediating help of the researcher, especially when the archive highlights historical differences between a text's time and a reader's that would be otherwise unknowable to the reader. When Gillian Beer analyzes the print culture surrounding *Middlemarch*'s original publication, for example, she asserts that without the context she is relaying—context available for most of us only through Beer's efforts—readers can never fully know the novel. Similarly, in her analysis of the philosophical influences on Eliot's novels, Elizabeth Ermarth suggests that expert knowledge is critical for full understanding: while one can enjoy *Middlemarch* without having read Eliot's essays and translations, she writes, "knowing those texts *does* seem necessary for critics whose aim is to do justice to her achievement and to avoid misrepresenting it."<sup>77</sup> In each case, for readers of Beer and Ermarth, one type of relationship to the novel—an improved knowledge of its meaning in historical context and a resulting empowerment to better understand it—occurs at the expense of another, the sense that *Middlemarch* directly reflects their lives and is accessible to them through their own experience.

Much as she is cautious that her solipsism not preclude "enlarging perspectives," however, Mead seems sensitive to how information from outside her experience also potentially limits both hers and her readers' sense of closeness to Eliot and *Middlemarch*. Relying on conventions typical of bibliomemoirs and in some types of academic work that seek to foreground the embodied nature of research processes, Mead invites readers into the archive with her through her descriptive writing. She also attempts to transform the historical differences she unearths between readers and Victorians into ultimate similarity that can be felt on an individual level. In this respect, Mead not

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<sup>77</sup> Ermarth, "Negotiating *Middlemarch*," Chase, 108.

only popularizes scholarship on Eliot and *Middlemarch*, but also models a way of using scholarly information to come to know Eliot and her work intimately.

Rather than going to archives and the places of Eliot's life to discover and reveal new information about her subject, Mead visits these sites to make scholars' pre-existing findings newly real for herself. In relating these visits in *My Life in Middlemarch*, she also makes them come alive for readers, such that in many moments in her book, the vicarious experience of physically visiting a place or handling source material becomes as important or more important than what the source says. As she does with her free-ranging identification with *Middlemarch*, Mead frames her approach to primary sites and sources as distinctly non-scholarly. For instance, of her trip to a New York archive to read one of Eliot's notebooks, Mead explains,

Scholars have cataloged the notebook's contents, but my reasons for going to spend time with it were not so much scholarly as they were personal, almost mystical. I wanted to know what was in the notebook—but more than that, I wanted a tactile encounter with something that had been Eliot's, as if the ink and paper itself might reveal something I didn't already know about her, and about *Middlemarch*.<sup>78</sup>

Mead is not alone in suggesting that academic experts research for information, while non-academic experts research for intimacy. While bibliomemoirists express aversion to academic research, when they *do* research, some of them, too, emphasize the experience as much as the findings. Dyer, for example, visits one of the homes of D.H. Lawrence and describes both his desire for the visit to bring him closeness to the author and the failure of the endeavor:

We had found [the house]. We stood silently. I knew this moment well from previous literary pilgrimages: you look and try to summon up feelings which don't exist. You try saying a mantra to yourself: "D.H. Lawrence lived here." You say, "I am standing in the place he stood, seeing the things he saw . . .", but nothing changes, everything remains exactly the same."<sup>79</sup>

The "pilgrimage" is a common feature of other "non-academic" research. In describing what he has learned from researching Romantic poets, for instance, biographer Richard Holmes observes that he

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<sup>78</sup> Mead, *My Life in Middlemarch*, 8.

<sup>79</sup> Dyer, *Out of Sheer Rage*, 60.

has drawn “conclusions about writing biography that were certainly not taught in academia,” one of which is to “*physically* pursue [a] subject through the past” in order to “feel how [the places of the subject’s life] once were [and] imagine what impact they might once have had.”<sup>80</sup> When they pursue closeness with deceased authors by visiting the locations they frequented, such researchers participate in a tradition of pilgrimage begun in the nineteenth century, when admirers of literary works visited authors’ “homes and haunts” in order to experience, as Alison Booth writes, an “imaginative expansion of both biography and fictitious text,” wherein “characters and authors” could be “transpos[ed] . . . into the same time and place as the pilgrims.”<sup>81</sup> Lynch suggests in her study of nineteenth-century pilgrimages that some nineteenth-century English literature itself promoted an affection for “literary landscapes,” encouraging readers to see the sites represented in literature, and the sites in which literature was produced, as representative of a collective “home,” at once accessible to pilgrims and perpetually shrouded in nostalgia.<sup>82</sup> Booth and Lynch note, as Mead and Holmes indicate, that literary critics from the twentieth century onward have been reluctant to confess enthusiasm for pilgrimages, wishing to distance themselves from the commercial elements of the literary pilgrimage, its kitsch tone, and its glorification of authors’ regional context at the expense of their national or global importance. Yet, Booth argues, academia is closely linked to pilgrimages: the canon from which literary academics now work was solidified partly through pilgrimages, and academics (like herself) continue to be moved by the artifacts of authors’ lives that can be encountered in their homes and in archives. The turn within some sectors of academia toward self-reflective scholarship and transparency about research further disturbs the sharp distinction figures like Mead and Holmes draw, or that some academics may draw themselves. Once more, the difference between the academic researcher and the non- or less-academic researcher lies

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<sup>80</sup> Holmes, “A Quest for the Real Coleridge,” *The New York Review of Books*, 18 Dec. 2014.

<sup>81</sup> Booth, “Author Country: Longfellow, the Brontës, and Anglophone Homes and Haunts.”

<sup>82</sup> Lynch, “Homes and Haunts: Austen’s and Mitford’s English Idylls,” 1103-04.

more in rhetorical positioning than in strict reality. But although Mead's work is less original than she asserts, it is nevertheless illuminating to consider how she frames archival experiences to position herself as a certain kind of expert, and how her transparency facilitates intimacy with Eliot and *Middlemarch* not only for her, but for her readers.

From her visit to the New York archive to handle Eliot's notebook, as her description of the visit predicts, Mead reveals no new facts about Eliot. She instead describes in vivid detail the experience of reading the notebook, including "the smell of a spent hearth" that the book emits and that she "surreptitiously inhaled," while trying to escape the notice of another patron reading E.M. Forster.<sup>83</sup> Unlike for Dyer, for whom the hoped-for closeness to a subject does not materialize with archival contact, for Mead, handling Eliot's belongings creates instant connection. Mead spins out an elaborate imagined history for the notebook, mentally mapping out the home Eliot lived in while she had the notebook and asserting that (despite the complicated provenance of the notebook, of which she is well aware) "maybe—just *maybe*—the book had absorbed molecules of smoke from a fireplace at the Priory."

An analysis of her archival subject, and even, when it comes to Mead's speculation about the origins of the smoke molecules, rational conclusions about it, are subordinated to a highly subjective readerly relationship: as with the evidence she provides for her analysis of Eliot's emotions in reading a letter from her stepson, here "evidence" is what is felt more than what is provable. However, whatever knowledge Mead fails to produce from critical analysis, she does produce for her reader a *sensory* knowledge of Eliot's notebook. While Mead apparently tries to hide her book-smelling from the student of Forster who occupies the reading room with her—suggesting her beliefs about the difference between her method and that typical of scholars—she freely confesses the act to readers of *My Life in Middlemarch*, a confession which is itself an act of intimacy. In

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<sup>83</sup> Mead, *My Life in Middlemarch*, 10-11.

addition to offering readers as much of the experience of Eliot's notebook as she can in a textual description, Mead's tactile encounter also serves as a basis for establishing for her reader the material conditions of Eliot's writing process, which could not be as vivid had her description been less speculative. These conditions may not have been exactly as Mead hopes—the fireplace at the Priory might not be the actual source of the scent—but they are at least approximated with some accuracy, the fireplace and the notebook no doubt occupying close space at some point, as Mead knows from her study of the house. Although readers never literally visit either location the way that Mead does, they are imaginatively ushered into both the archive and, by extension, Eliot's home. If her speculations only vaguely point to accurate historical truth, Mead is upfront about their limitations, those speculations being fully situated for her reader as part of an embodied research process in which Mead's own physical and emotional associations shape her view of the archival object.

Mead also expands her “archive” beyond formal repositories to the places in which Eliot herself lived and worked, much as Dyer visits Lawrence's home or biographers like Holmes visit the places their subjects inhabited. In this way, she also fulfills the broader mandate of Kirsch and Rohan's *Beyond the Archives* by going, literally, beyond the traditional archives to develop her knowledge of Eliot and *Middlemarch*. On these occasions, Mead again uses her sensory experience with the places and objects she visits, as well as her past life experience to breathe life into Eliot's experiences for the reader. For example, describing Eliot and Lewes's visit to Weymouth during the time Eliot was writing *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), Mead writes, “I can picture them standing on the stone steps of the brick house on East Street, deciding which way to go. . . . I can see them there, because this is my home-scene. This is the town I grew up in.”<sup>84</sup> Although Weymouth is not the town most of Mead's readers grew up in, Mead conjures sights, sounds, and smells she has personally known—“the tang of brine,” “the pungent smell of hops and yeast,” “tanned mariners

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 50-51.

with soft Wessex accents”—to place readers there. She takes her reader through her visits with Eliot’s step-descendants, during which she handles Eliot’s personal effects, and to the National Portrait Gallery, where she “looked at [a portrait] for a long time, trying to imagine the animating spark, the light of intelligence and comprehension flashing from [Eliot’s] brow, trying to hear her voice.”<sup>85</sup> Making the conditions of her archival research transparently part of her presentation of her subject matter, and moreover, sharing that context with her own reader to the extent that it is possible, Mead collapses the distance between herself, the archive, and the readers of *My Life in Middlemarch*.

Mead’s efforts to put readers in the archives are aimed to reduce the differences readers perceive between here and there, now and then, as well as to reduce readers’ sense of intimidation from scholarship that frames archival findings as unique, privileged windows onto a subject. Paradoxically, many of the moments in which Mead does directly bring forth information that highlights the specifically Victorian context of Eliot and *Middlemarch*—and its difference from our modern age—are *also* aimed at collapsing readers’ sense of distance from Eliot and from scholarship. In reframing the unknowability of past times as a window into the uncertainty and instability of *any* time, Mead repeatedly turns historical distance into a sense of perpetual present. Thus, what first looks like typical mediation—guiding readers through difference as articulated by primary sources—is intended to help readers believe that they can relate to the Victorians because of an unlikely sameness.

For example, while describing the landscapes of Eliot’s life helps Mead get readers “into” Eliot’s world, at some moments the impermanence of places does threaten to obscure that world, leaving Mead as detached as Dyer in Lawrence’s home. In one such moment, Mead visits Eliot’s childhood home, Griff House, and finds that although she can walk the halls Eliot walked, she

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 108-09, 129.

cannot recover the house as Eliot would have experienced it. Griff House, she writes, “could not be further from the sleepier atmosphere of the 1820s,” now no longer in the countryside but plagued by “an incessant roar of traffic from the highway”: “It felt ridiculous to be wandering these rooms, trying to ignore the glowing fire-escape signs and the soft rock on the sound system, and attempting to imagine the house as it was.”<sup>86</sup> Rather than putting readers in Griff House as Eliot experienced it, as she does with Weymouth, Mead here highlights the alienation and distance from Eliot she feels in the modernized place. The house makes her further reflect on the difficulty of learning about the interior world of a writer—whereas, she suggests, a painter’s studio reveals much about the process of creation, “the nature of literary creativity” cannot be easily accessed through “the site of creation.” If at other moments Mead pushes to make the archive come alive, here she brings out the tantalizing nature of archival research (broadly conceived), the ways in which it points toward its subject but always leaves only a partial record, which makes it an “unsatisfying endeavor.”

Yet Mead seems reluctant to allow Griff House to be only a symbol of distance between herself, her readers, and Eliot. She salvages identification in the dissatisfying encounter by making Griff House a statement on shared nostalgia. Recalling the opening of Eliot’s *Felix Holt* (1866), which describes a landscape that, she suggests, “can appear sentimental” in its beauty, Mead argues that Eliot’s descriptions are actually expressions of “an authentic nostalgia.”<sup>87</sup> In *Felix Holt*, she remembers, “Eliot describes a landscape that was already vanishing when she was writing. During her childhood, Griff House looked out over fields, but within a few years a colliery was visible from its upper windows.” Pointing to Eliot’s presumed nostalgia over the changes to her childhood home, Mead recasts her own feeling of disconnect with Griff House as a source of similarity with Eliot: both are at some point unable to completely access the Griff House of the 1820s. In this

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 34-36.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 35.

formulation, if readers, like Mead, have difficulty putting themselves in Eliot's settings, they are in one sense all the more in sync with Eliot.

Mead also collapses the distance between Eliot's original readers and her current readers by at once raising and diminishing the differences between the ways they each encounter the novel. Noting that *Middlemarch* was originally published in serial form, Mead highlights the fact that its early readers would have experienced great suspense about its plot, having to wait months for each installment. Referencing reviews of the novel at the time of its publication in the *Athenaeum* and the *Daily Telegraph*, Mead observes, "no one at all beyond Eliot knew how the novel would conclude, and the whole reading public was on tenterhooks to discover what would happen next."<sup>88</sup> Thus, during the breaks between publication these readers could entertain the possibility that Dorothea and Lydgate would marry. As Beer comments in her discussion of *Middlemarch*'s serialization, "The pauses between publication gave space for communal reflection and conversation, [which are] lost to us now."<sup>89</sup> Given that the novel is now available fully bound in one book, the suspense and time for reflection experienced by today's readers, while perhaps intense, is much more short-lived; a devoted reader can finish the novel from beginning to end within the space of a week or two. Because her first readings of *Middlemarch* were not punctuated as an original Victorian reader's would have been, Mead suggests, "It's easy for me to forget that there was ever a time when I did not know how the love problems presented in the novel would be resolved."

As with her visit to Griff House, Mead's attempts to re-enter the Victorian world are partially stymied by historical distance, by her inability, in this case, to encounter the novel in serial form—it is "easy to forget" that the way she reads the novel is not how it was always read. At the same time, however, Mead turns her reflections on *Middlemarch*'s serialization into an act of remembrance, helping her to recall that there *was* indeed a time when she, too, wondered if Lydgate

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>89</sup> Beer, "What's Not in *Middlemarch*," Chase, 24-25.



would end up with Dorothea, even if that time was brief. (Incidentally, Beer also observes that it is possible to somewhat recreate the experience of original readers by deliberately spacing out one's reading of the novel, even if one has read it before.) In grouping herself with a general Victorian readership and suggesting that suspense is inevitable in reading the novel, Mead encourages readers to see their own reading experience as a microcosm of the Victorian reader's more extended involvement: their impressions of the novel, when examined in more detail and as though in slow motion, can hint at, if not recreate, a Victorian reading experience.

Perhaps the greatest barrier between modern readers and *Middlemarch*, the preachy tone of the narrator that gives the novel a distinctly old-fashioned feel, can also be removed, in Mead's framework, by historical distance itself. Mead first tackles Eliot's reputation for being "unappealingly ponderous" by expanding on that reputation rather extensively, reviewing her poor standing among some of her contemporaries and immediate predecessors.<sup>90</sup> She quotes those who, in contrast to those among Eliot's contemporaries who legitimately viewed her as a deserving "eminent Victorian," critiqued and mocked Eliot's seriousness, including Eliza Lynn Linton, Bessie Rayner Parkes, George Saintsbury, Lytton Strachey, Edmund Gosse, and even Virginia Woolf: Eliot to these readers was "pretentious," "part of a bygone era," "pathetic and provincial," "laughable."<sup>91</sup> Particularly during and after World War I, Mead reports, Eliot's "meliorism," her naïve belief in the power of gradual good, seemed terribly insufficient. In drawing on sources from earlier times to establish other, often quite prominent, readers' opinions of Eliot, Mead draws a connection between readers today who feel distanced from Eliot's tone and labored philosophy and many well-respected readers of the past, most of whom also read Eliot after Eliot's lifetime. As she does for readers who experience alienation from Eliot's childhood home, Mead implies that readers who chafe at Eliot's style need not feel uniquely disconnected from past times, but should actually feel particularly of a

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<sup>90</sup> Mead, *My Life in Middlemarch*, 217.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 218-21.

moment with them. Modern readers' discomfort with Eliot's aggressive morality may not make them inadequate readers but rather, in light of this historical information, justified in finding *Eliot* inadequate to speak to real life. Normalizing readers' sense of disaffection by making it a communal experience, Mead turns distance into a different kind of closeness.

However, Mead then reverses course by framing earlier readers' dislike of Eliot's high-mindedness as reactionary, and therefore bound to soften with time: "It seems to me," she writes, "that this reflex of embarrassment has diminished as our distance from Eliot has grown."<sup>92</sup> We have grown *so* unserious that, she indicates, "Eliot's melancholy, willed seriousness resonates" once again, a much-needed prompting to "take ourselves as seriously as she took us."<sup>93</sup> Mead does not provide any evidence from a broad readership that Eliot's seriousness has a new relevance; her conclusion seems based on her own sense of Eliot's relevance, how "it seems to [her]." Nevertheless, her careful use of the concept of time allows her to double the similarity readers may feel with the Victorians on account of Eliot's tone. If today's readers may be grouped with earlier readers in finding Eliot off-putting, the very dissimilarity between Eliot's style and readers' expectations today also forges a powerful connection across time. If we feel Eliot is difficult to know because of her seriousness, that inaccessibility points us to our own lack, making her work teach us something about ourselves. Whether as a prophetic voice or as a nostalgic one, Eliot's is timeless.

In the vein of Kucich, in these moments Mead uses historical information—of place, of publication, of a text's reception—to make the past a clarifying commentary on the present and vice versa. Yet, she neither identifies the immutable differences between past and present nor establishes a diachronic history between past and present, two modes of historicizing that Kucich outlines. Apparent differences collapse into sameness, as with the difference between Eliot's landscape and ours, and when the world changes, such as with readers' appreciation of seriousness, it does so in

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 220.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 223.

leaps not closely tied to events, and not as gradual, explicable evolution. Nor can the “sympathetic understanding” Mead establishes with the past be contained as a mere intellectual recognition of likeness. Instead, Mead uses scholarly methods and scholarship, from her personal visit to Eliot’s home to her use of primary sources (some previously gathered by scholars), to encourage readers to *feel* as Eliot may have felt, and as her Victorian readers felt. Although mediating forces from history are involved in Mead’s reading, they are involved only to the extent that they create relationships. Like her descriptions of the archives, and like her sympathetic positioning of herself as a reader outside the academy who reads for personal and social fulfillment, Mead’s inclusive rendering of historical difference leaves space for readers to see themselves, along with her, as part of the blend of contexts that makes *Middlemarch*’s meaning.

## Conclusion

While she over-dramatizes the differences between her form of expertise and that of academics, Mead’s efforts to inform readers about *Middlemarch* and Eliot can be read as answering Sidonie Smith’s call for “multiple reading strategies” in the humanities. On the one hand, *My Life in Middlemarch* models and to some extent justifies identification, as a practice that is neither entirely solipsistic nor entirely ungrounded in specific experience; on the other hand, Mead’s book models how scholarly research techniques that take readers outside of themselves need not distance the reader. In both cases, Mead implies that her readers benefit from a guide to reading: although most of her book invites unmediated identification and positive emotional response, the existence and popularity of *My Life in Middlemarch* stands as a testament to readers’ perceived need for some guidance, even if only guidance in the form of a model for how to relate to books that might otherwise seem inaccessible. A “Reader’s Guide” included as an appendix to *My Life in Middlemarch* reinforces this perceived need.<sup>94</sup> Written by Amy Clements, the guide encourages readers in book

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 299-303.

clubs to take up Mead's implicit invitation to identify, in a style more direct and literal than Mead's: "As you read Mead's exploration of Dorothea Brooke Casaubon," Clements prompts, "how did these scenes compare to your own transformation, during and well beyond adolescence?" Or, "In your opinion, how did [George Henry Lewes] and his sons affect Eliot's approach to write about male characters?" Clements further prods Mead's readers to reflect on how Mead's framing of research promotes intimacy with her subject. "What does Mead gain," she asks, "by spending time with pages that were touched by Eliot's own hand?" As a reader's guide to a book about *another* reader's experience with a book, and as an echo of the questions Mead herself raises in her text, Clement's guidance can seem redundant, mediation to a book that already offers itself as the mediator. At the same time, the reader's guide makes explicit the widespread assumption—at least, Mead's publishers' assumption—that readers do indeed desire to connect personally with Eliot and her novel through Mead's mediation, as well as through discussing *My Life in Middlemarch* with others.

Of course, by Mead's own admission, and as my comparisons of her conclusions with those of several scholars demonstrate, *My Life in Middlemarch* is not a substitute for historically and theoretically rigorous scholarship, or for more detached engagements with literature. As much as it bridges multiple modes of informing readers, *My Life in Middlemarch* shows that there is no one commentary, or type of information, that can comprehensively inform a reader about a text, and further, that one type may inevitably preclude other, also valid types. The gaps left by Mead's approach are especially apparent in one moment near the end of the book. In recounting a bizarre incident from Eliot's honeymoon with her husband John Cross, when Cross jumped from a hotel window into a canal in apparent mental distress, Mead chooses not to engage in speculation that Eliot's marriage to a much younger man was a mistake, a prevailing opinion among many commentators. She justifies her interpretive decision as only an "inclination": "My own inclination is to step back from the bedroom . . . and to let the event stand in its singular, perplexing strangeness,

one episode in Eliot's life, but not its defining one."<sup>95</sup> She continues in the passage by somewhat inexplicably connecting Cross's dive not to the oddness of his union with Eliot, but to the thought, which she says she "prefer[s] to reflect upon" instead, that Eliot probably never learned to swim, and was thus denied the wonderful experience of swimming that Mead herself enjoys. Unlike most of the connections Mead draws between her life and Eliot's, this one baffles—it seems to be an intentionally distracting move, forced by the insufficiency of Mead's usual interpretive methods in this instance to explain and admire Eliot's biography.

In a sense, Mead's choice to be strategically selective in her interpretations acts out *Middlemarch's* own conclusions about the inevitable insufficiency of any one mode of reading. Recall J. Hillis Miller's assertion that, by making the knowledge possessed by each of its characters incomplete, *Middlemarch* "implicitly deconstructs also both its own power to make an orderly narrative and the reader's power to comprehend the novel integrally."<sup>96</sup> Thus, Miller argues, the reader is invited to construct meaning out of partial knowledge, always "open to certain possibilities of meaning in *Middlemarch*," but "blind to others."<sup>97</sup> One of the ways the novel equivocates, leaving its reader to construct meaning, is in portraying several kinds of fictional readers, but fully endorsing none. Neither the haphazard Mr. Brooke, who is forever free associating scraps of texts from his memory, nor his reading foil, the exhaustive, meticulous reader Casaubon, produces much knowledge that is valued by other characters. And yet, as Auerbach argues, while most characters in *Middlemarch* disparage Casaubon's work, none actually possesses the expertise to evaluate his *Key to All Mythologies*, the novel leaving open the possibility that Casaubon is an underrated reader and interpreter. For her part, Mary Garth might represent a measured approach to identifying with literature, acknowledging but qualifying the possibility of literature offering a coherent model for her

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 207.

<sup>96</sup> J. Hillis Miller, "A Conclusion in Which Almost Nothing Is Concluded," Chase, 138.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 153.

actions. Asked by her lover and longtime friend Fred Vincy whether women ever love men they have always known, Mary “archly” reviews her “experience” by analyzing various female literary characters romantically entangled with new or familiar men—Juliet, Ophelia, Flora MacIvor—and concludes playfully that “altogether [her] experience is rather mixed,” as some of these literary relationships were new and others long established.<sup>98</sup> Mary here draws on the variety of fictional romances to assert the impossibility of answering a broad question like Fred’s—as literary characters have diverse experiences, so do people, she implies. But at the same time, Mary expresses her skepticism that fiction can reliably mirror reality, teasingly pointing out that “experience” from reading is not the same as “experience” in life.

If Mary’s restrained application of literature to life is responsible and commendable, though, it is the “ardent” characters, and ardent readers, with whom *Middlemarch* is most engaged: the passionate Dorothea Brooke, Tertius Lydgate, and Will Ladislaw. While these figures make some of the biggest mistakes in the novel, they are also the standard against which the provinciality and narrowness, or the lackluster emotional life, of the other characters is measured. The ardency with which Mead identifies with *Middlemarch* reflects the ardency of the character she most identifies with, Dorothea, who, like Mead, reads for useful meaning as much as for accuracy: “I have always been thinking,” Dorothea comments at one point,

of the different ways in which Christianity is taught, and whenever I find one way that makes it a wider blessing than any other, I cling to that as the truest—I mean that which takes in the most good of all kinds and brings in the most people as sharers in it. It is surely better to pardon too much than to condemn too much.<sup>99</sup>

While the novel qualifies Dorothea’s idealism from beginning to end, it also validates the character trait expressed in this passage, her persistent desire to identify and further goodness, what the narrator describes in the final passage of the novel as her “incalculably diffusive” positive influence

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<sup>98</sup> George Eliot, *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life*, 149-50.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 531.

on the “growing good of the world.” Both in identifying with the elements of Eliot’s life and work that help her to make sense of her life and in identifying with those elements that especially motivate her to improve—and eschewing information and perspectives that are not useful in these regards—Mead takes on this same philosophy of Dorothea’s, applied to reading Eliot’s fiction and biography rather than to Christianity. Mead seems to avoid delving into the Cross story in order to keep Eliot doing “the most good of all kinds” and “bring[ing] in the most people as sharers in it,” in Dorothea’s words: she encourages readers to take the good out of Eliot and her work, and not to worry about the rest. Whatever the unevenness and lack of rigor in Mead’s approach, it does not undo the positive effects—the “growing good”—that result in Mead’s life from her identification with *Middlemarch* and Eliot’s biography, and her taking lessons from what is “wise and essential and profound” in both. Likewise, as a guide to readers, the bibliomemoir might be seen as a “growing good,” a genre that offers imperfect but nevertheless desirable, and necessary, opportunities for readers to make meaning of literature.

## **Coda**

The qualified good of Mead’s guidance leads me to reflect on some of the tensions in my own representation of informed reading in this dissertation as a whole: what kind of guide am I to you, as my reader? Each chapter explores frictions between everyday readers and professional readers, over which methods of book selection, and which types of information, provided by whom, prove the best foundation for reading. In depicting differences in the values and habits of these various kinds of readers as they are represented by literary and other texts—between circulating library catalogue users and academic categorizers of Victorian fiction, between customers and cultured booksellers, and between wandering browsers and literary critics and teachers—I am mostly sympathetic toward reader-directed selection and reader-centered information about books. Throughout, however, I do not discuss how I myself encountered, learned about, and selected the

sources I used, or whom or what I identified with from my material as I completed the project. Rather, I privilege historical and theoretical frameworks to recount and analyze Victorian voices on the subject of informed reading.

What might this study have looked like if I had chosen to privilege my autobiography in framing my analysis? I might have indicated how my focus on Victorian booksellers' struggle to bridge intellect, the arts, money-making, and human relationships was partly motivated by my own experience of trying to explain to friends and family why literary scholarship matters. I might have explained that in Chapter Two, I chose to analyze representations of secondhand booksellers—rather than the many other types of booksellers I had read about in my research—not only because they were the subject of a distinct Victorian trope, but also because the ambivalence manifested toward their work corresponded to my own ambivalence about my career plans. In Chapter Three, I could have shared how, sitting in a Sunday School lesson during church recently, I thought about the ways that my interest in Victorian browsers, one of the earliest topics I identified for my dissertation, springs from my lifelong immersion in religious reading as a Mormon. In such reading, personal, often emotional, need and circumstance drive reading selection and interpretation as much as (and sometimes in place of) expert interpretations or historical context, or even close attention to the language of the text itself. I have always been fascinated by that mode of reading, finding it to be simultaneously enlightening and inane, unifying and isolating, productive but potentially dangerous. And I might have shared that my choice to study informed reading in general came partly from a series of early experiences of solitary meandering through primary sources, in which my delight at discovering funny or surprising moments related to the topic—and significantly, of discovering them *myself*, fairly randomly—encouraged me to stake claim on the subject as my own.

Foregrounding these informing factors could have allowed me to make more connections between the present and the past, and perhaps to portray my subject with more overt sympathy. My



choice, instead, to emphasize only the other factors that informed my reading, including historical context, theory, and the interests that drive recent literary criticism, is partly due to the limits of time, space, and, probably, my thinking and writing abilities. But if focusing my writing away from myself and my concerns has foreclosed some interpretive possibilities, it has also opened others. My less inward-looking focus has allowed me, for example, to frame my topic to speak to a broad academic readership who may not share my personal experiences and concerns, and might be distracted or even alienated by an emphasis on myself; it has pushed me to delve deeper into the historical context of my subject, since I was not relying on my contemporary context.

From reflecting on these trade-offs, I realize how messy, contradictory, and contingent “informed reading” actually is. Reader-centered, reader-driven information usually underpins writing that appears to be emotionally detached. At the same time, the “detached” elements of my scholarly training permeate reading in my personal life, when reading to identify, enjoy, or be inspired is disrupted despite myself: when I find myself looking into the context of a novel I thought I was just reading for fun, or when the sexism of scripture becomes too much to handle, and I look to Mormon and other scholarship for evidence of the constructedness of divine writing, to understand how divinity squares with the injustices committed in its name.

When it comes to informing one’s reading or identifying what *does* inform one’s reading, some selectivity may not only be inevitable, but strategic for certain ends, as Mead, and as *Middlemarch*, imply. When I bring what I know of narrative theory to bear on the Book of Mormon, I see authorial strategies at play, writers trying to establish credibility or shunt blame elsewhere; when I do not, and consider only what a story brings out in my emotions, I am more easily able, as Mead does with *Middlemarch*, to “liken” the scriptures to my own life, as we say in Mormon parlance, and simply consider what the author has to teach me. Both approaches are instructive. In life and in my dissertation, I do not read with all types of information, and with every possible orientation toward a

text, in play *at the same time*, I constantly switch modes on and off, drawing on different types of context to experience literature, depending on its availability, on the text at hand, the people in the room or in my head, and what I perceive I am expected to produce from my reading. What matters most are my goals as a reader, on either side of and across the porous boundaries of professional and personal life.

If my dissertation was motivated by a desire to resolve the paradoxes of informed reading, Mead's own indeterminate position is perhaps the natural ending place for questions that, I might have predicted, have no satisfying answer. But as reading Lynch, Warner, Mead, Mudie's catalogues, and Maggie's experience in *The Mill on the Floss* has led me to see, what looks like binaries may instead be an eternally striving dialectic. The result of my different positions as a reader is that I am never fully satisfied with the conclusions I draw from just one set of informing sources, one attitude toward reading, or one type of encounter with a text, but this dissatisfaction prompts a constant revisiting, and rethinking, of my reading. It is worth valuing *all* the contingencies that shape my selection of books and that inform my reading of them, even if they cannot be fully simultaneous; each brings, as Dorothea might say, "good" of some kind, and each brings "people as sharers in it."

## Appendix 1

### Pages from Mudie's Catalogues

The following figures (beginning on the next page) offer examples of how Mudie's catalogues describe the library's collection, justify the catalogue's organization, and represent books to patrons over time.

- Bremer, Frederica, Brothers and Sisters. 3 vols. post 8vo.  
 ——— The Midnight Sun. Post 8vo.  
 ——— Father and Daughter. Post 8vo.  
 Briar, The, and the Myrtle. 12mo.  
 Bride of Lammermoor, by Scott. 12mo.  
 Brief Career, The. 3 vols. post 8vo.  
 Brimelsea. 2 vols. post 8vo.  
 Briscoe, Mrs., The Young Bride. 3 vols. post 8vo.  
 Brittany and La Vendée, Tales of. Post 8vo.  
 Brontë, Charlotte, Jane Eyre. 12mo.  
 ——— Shirley. 12mo.  
 ——— Villette. 12mo.  
 ——— The Professor. 2 vols. post 8vo.  
 ——— Emily, Wuthering Heights. 12mo.  
 Brooke, Henry, The Fool of Quality. 2 vols. post 8vo.  
 Brooks, Shirley, The Gordian Knot. 8vo.  
 Brown, C. Brockden, Edgar Huntley. 12mo.  
 ——— Wells, Clotel; or the President's Daughter. Post  
 8vo.  
 Brunton, Mrs., Self-Control. 12mo.  
 ——— Discipline. 12mo.  
 Buccaneer, The, by Mrs. S. C. Hall. 12mo.  
 Bunbury, Selina, Our Own Story. 3 vols. post 8vo.  
 ——— Florence Sackville; or Self-Dependence.  
 3 vols. post 8vo.  
 ——— Sir Guy d'Esterre. 2 vols. post 8vo.  
 Bungener, L. F., The Priest and the Huguenot. 12mo.  
 ——— Julian; or the Close of an Era. 2 vols.  
 12mo.  
 Bush Boys, The, by Captain Mayne Reid. 12mo.  
 Butler, Lady Rachel, Jessie Cameron. 12mo.  
 CÆCILIA METELLA; or Rome enslaved by Æmilia Julia.  
 Post 8vo.  
 Caleb Field, by the Authoress of "Margaret Maitland."  
 Post 8vo.  
 ——— Stukely. Post 8vo.  
 ——— Williams, by Godwin. 12mo.  
 Callcott, M. H., Home amongst Strangers. 2 vols. 12mo.  
 Campbells, The. 3 vols. post 8vo.  
 Canadian Crusoes, The, by Mrs. Traill. 12mo.

**Fig. 1.** Mudie's 1860 catalogue lists Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* as a single-volume, duodecimo text. Note that the catalogue includes volume numbers and sizes for each novel. Note as well how comparatively few three-volume, post-octavo novels are listed in the collection.

- Day, The, of Small Things, by the Author of "Mary Powell." Post 8vo.
- Days of my Life, by Margaret Oliphant. 3 vols. post 8vo.
- of Old. 12mo.
- Deacon, W. F., Annette, a Tale. 3 vols. post 8vo.
- Dead Secret, The, by Wilkie Collins. 2 vols. post 8vo.
- Dean's Daughter, The, by Mrs. Gore. 3 vols. post 8vo.
- Dean, The; or the Popular Preacher. 3 vols. post 8vo.
- Dearforgil, Princess of Brefney. Post 8vo.
- Debit and Credit, translated by Mrs. Malcolm. Post 8vo.
- Deborah's Diary, a Sequel to "Mary Powell." 12mo.
- De Cressy. 12mo.
- Deerbrook, by Harriet Martineau. 12mo.
- Parsonage. 3 vols. post 8vo.
- Deerslayer, The, by J. F. Cooper. 12mo.
- De Foix, by Mrs. Bray. 12mo.
- De Lorme, by G. P. R. James. 8vo.
- Dennes, The, of Daundelyon. 3 vols. post 8vo.
- Destiny, by Miss Ferrier. 12mo.
- Deverell, by Mrs. Charles Browne. 3 vols. post 8vo.
- Devereux, by Sir E. B. Lytton. 12mo.
- Diana Wynyard. 3 vols. post 8vo.
- Diary of a late Physician, by Samuel Warren. 2 vols. 12mo.
- Dickens, Charles, Sketches in London. Post 8vo.
- by Boz. Post 8vo.
- Pickwick Papers. 2 vols. post 8vo.
- Nicholas Nickleby. 2 vols. post 8vo.
- Oliver Twist. Post 8vo.
- The Old Curiosity Shop. 2 vols. post 8vo.
- Barnaby Rudge, and Hard Times. 2 vols. post 8vo.
- Martin Chuzzlewit. 2 vols. post 8vo.
- Christmas Books. Post 8vo.
- Dombey and Son. Post 8vo.
- David Copperfield. Post 8vo.
- Bleak House. Post 8vo.
- Hard Times. Post 8vo.
- Little Dorrit. 8vo.
- A Tale of Two Cities. 8vo.

**Fig. 2.** This page from Mudie's 1860 catalogue shows the author entry for Charles Dickens, whose name is followed by an extensive list of his works in the collection. In part because of the large number of Dickens works circulated by Mudie's, resulting in a large amount of space dedicated to his author entry, Dickens's name appears as a strong "categorizer" for his works in the catalogue.

- Old Chelsea Bunhouse, The, by the Author of "Claude the Colporteur." Post 8vo.
- Court Suburb, The, by Leigh Hunt. 2 vols. post 8vo.
- Curiosity Shop, by Charles Dickens. Post 8vo.
- Debt, by Florence Dawson. 2 vols. post 8vo.
- Dominion, The, by G. P. R. James. 3 vols. post 8vo.
- English Gentleman, The. 12mo.
- Grey Church, The. 3 vols. post 8vo.
- Home, The, by Mrs. Mackenzie Daniel. 3 vols. post 8vo.
- House, The, by the River. Post 8vo.
- Judge, The, by Sam Slick. Post 8vo.
- Maid, The, of the Family. 3 vols. post 8vo.
- Memories. 3 vols. post 8vo.
- Minor Canon, The, by Erskine Neale. Small 8vo.
- Monastery, The, by the Author of "Clara." 2 vols. post 8vo.
- Mortality, by Sir W. Scott. 12mo.
- Palace, The, by Julia Tilt. 2 vols. post 8vo.
- Plantation, The, by James Hungerford, of Maryland. Post 8vo.
- Vicarage, The, by Mrs. Hubback. 3 vols. post 8vo.
- Oliphant, Margaret, Days of my Life. 3 vols. post 8vo.
- The Athelings; or the Three Gifts. 3 vols. post 8vo.
- Harry Muir. 3 vols. post 8vo.
- Mrs. Margaret Maitland, of Sunnyside. Post 8vo.
- The Quiet Heart. Post 8vo.
- Katie Stewart. 12mo.
- Zaidée, a Romance. 3 vols. post 8vo.
- Lilliesleaf. 3 vols. post 8vo.
- Orphans. Post 8vo.
- The Laird of Norlaw. 3 vols. post 8vo.
- Agnes Hopetoun's School Days.— 12mo.
- Lucy Crofton. Post 8vo.
- Olive, Hastings, by Mrs. Parry. 3 vols. post 8vo.
- Oliver Cromwell, by C. E. Stewart. 2 vols. post 8vo.
- Twist, by Charles Dickens. Post 8vo.

**Fig. 3.** The last entry on this page from Mudie's 1860 catalogue shows *Oliver Twist* indicated primarily by title, rather than by Dickens's name. The choice enables patrons to encounter *Oliver Twist* without directly encountering the rest of Dickens's oeuvre, in contrast to the author entry for Dickens shown in fig. 2.



and **subjects**. Works upon every **topic of national importance** will be found under an appropriate heading, such for instance as the **Arts, Army and Navy, Politics, Economics, Theology, Sociology, Philosophy, Science, Sport, etc., etc.** **History, Travel and Social Life** are grouped under the names of the countries concerned; a very extensive selection of **Memoirs, Diaries, etc., of celebrated men and women** forms an especial **feature** in this connection. A Synopsis of the classification and a copious Index have been compiled, so that, by consulting these, readers will without difficulty trace books upon any subject required that are circulated by the Library. The Synopsis and Index occupy the pages immediately following.

**Division II.** of the Catalogue contains **works of Fiction**, placed first **under their titles**, followed by an alphabetical list of **Authors** with the **novels** they have written; in this section the names and works of the popular **novelists** of the **Victorian and present era** are **fully represented**.

Many novels have **predominant historical, topographical and psychological** interest; to facilitate reference to these a **classified selection** of Fiction is included, which by a simple arrangement is linked with the **more solid works** of a similar nature in Division I.

For the **Juvenile reader** a **specially selected** list of some **two thousand** books is given at the end of the Catalogue; this selection comprises **instructive reading in History, Science, and Morals, suitable for the young**, together with Stories arranged under **topics to suit boys and girls of all ages**.

**Fig. 4.** As this page from the preface to the 1902 catalogue explains, Mudie's Edwardian catalogues divide fiction (excluding juvenile fiction) into three lists, one by title, one by author, and one classified by subject.



# FICTION Part I UNDER TITLES

Novels and Collections of Stories complete in one volume  
arranged alphabetically under Titles.

Stories for Young Readers, see Part IV.

- AARON** in the Wildwoods.....Harris, J. C.  
**Aaron** the Jew.....Farjeon, B. L.  
 "A 439," Autograph of a Piano  
     25 Musical Scribes.  
**Abandoned**.....Russell, W. C.  
**Abbé Aubain** and Mosaics.....Mérimée, P.  
**Abbé Mouret's** Transgression.....Zola, E.  
**Abdess of** Vlaze.....Weyman, S.  
**Abel Drake's** Wife.....Saunders, J.  
**Abner Daniel**.....Harben, W. N.  
**Aboveboard**.....Metcalf, W. C.  
**Abraham's** Sacrifice.....Gustaf, J.  
**Abroad** with Twitty.....Mulliner, E.  
**Absalom's** Hair: Painful Memory. Björnson.  
**Absolutely** True.....Montagu, I.  
**Absurd** Repentance.....Lucas, St. J.  
**Accessory** After the Fact.....Adams, Mrs. L.  
**Accomplice**.....Hill, F. T.  
**According** to Plato.....Moore, F. F.  
**According** to St. John.....Rives, A.  
**Accountant**.....Mel, F. H.  
**Accused** and Accuser.....Sergeant, A.  
**Accused** Princess.....Upward, A.  
**Ace o' Hearts**.....Bain, C.  
**Acrobat**.....Barry, J. D.  
**Across** an Ulster Bog.....Hamilton, M.  
**Across** the Salt Seas.....Burton, J. B.  
**Across** the World for a Wife.....Boothby, G.  
**Across** the Zodiac.....Pallander, E.  
**Act** in a Backwater.....Benson, E. F.  
**Act of** Impulse.....Bayliss, H.  
**Acté**.....Westbury, H.  
**Active** Service.....Crane, S.  
**Actor-Manager**.....Merrick, L.  
**Actor's** Wooing.....Miln, L. J.  
**Ad Finem** Esto Fidelis.....Leake, A. J. De C.  
**Ada** Triscott.....Haggard, Capt. A.  
**Ada** Vernham, Actress.....Marsh, R.  
**Adam** Grigson.....Pasture, Mrs. H. de la.  
**Adam** Johnstone's Son.....Crawford, M.  
**Admirable** Lady Biddy Fane.....Barrett, F.  
**Admirable** Tinker.....Jepson, E.  
**Admiral: a** Romance of Nelson.....Sladen, D.  
**Admonition**.....Ayscough, J.  
**Adopted** Wife.....Keyser, A.  
**Adria, a** Tale of Venice.....Hood, A. N.  
**Adrian** Rome.....Dowson and Moore.  
**Adrian** Vidal.....Norris, W. E.  
**Adrienne**.....'Rita.'  
**Advanced** Guard.....Grier, S. C.  
**Adventure, Princess** Sylvia. Williamson, Mrs.  
**Adventure** of the Broad Arrow.....Roberts, M.  
**Adventurer** of the North.....Parker, G.  
**Adventurers**.....Watson, H. B. M.  
**Adventures** in Legend.....Lorne, Marquis of.  
**Adventures** of a Fair Rebel.....Crim, M.  
**Adventures** of Alicia.....Tynan, K.  
**Adventures** of a Goldsmith. Bouchier, M. H.  
**Adventures** of a Lady Pearl-Broker. Maxwell.  
**Adventures** of a Martyr's Bible.....Firth, G.  
**Adventures** of a Micro-Man.....Pallander, E.  
**Adventures** of a Ship's Doctor.....Roberts, M.  
**Adventures** of a Solicitor.....Chesney, W.  
**Adventures** of a Supercargo.....Becke, L.  
**Adventures** of an Equerry.....Gerard, M.  
**Adventures** of Augustus Short.....Marsh, R.  
**Adventures** of Captain Horn. Stockton, F. R.  
**Adventures** of Captain Kettle.....Hyne, C.  
**Adventures** of Comte de la Muette. Capes, B.  
**Adventures** of Downy V. Green. Calderon, G.  
**Adventures** of François.....Mitchell, S. W.  
**Adventures** of Gerard.....Doyle, A. C.  
**Adventures** of Hajji Baba.....Morie, J.  
**Adventures** of Harry Revel. Quiller-Couch, A.  
**Adventures** of John Johns.....Carrel, F.  
**Adventures** of Jones.....Carruth, H.  
**Adventures** of Louis de Rougemont.  
**Adventures** of Louis Dural.....Bryant, M.  
**Adventures** of Martin Hewitt. Morrison, A.  
**Adventures** of M. D'Haricot. Clouston, J. S.  
**Adventures** of Miranda.....Meade, L. T.  
**Adventures** of Mr. Topham.....Gull, C. R.  
**Adventures** of Picklock Holes. Lehmann, R. C.  
**Adventures** of Rosalie Stuart.....Shaw, W.  
**Adventures** of Sir John Sparrow. Begbie, H.  
**Adventures** of Sherlock Holmes. Doyle, A. C.  
**Adventures** of the Adventurers' Club.  
**Adventures** of Tyler Tatlock.....Donovan, D.  
**Adventures** of Ulysses.....Gull, C. R.  
**Adventuress**.....Meade, L. T.  
**Adventuress**.....Edwardes, Mrs.  
**Aerial** Burglars.....Blyth, J.  
**Affair** at the Inn.....Various.  
**Affairs** of the Heart.....Hunt, V.  
**Afield** and Afloat.....Stockton, F. R.  
**African** Millionaire.....Allen, G.  
**African** Night's Entertainment. Dawson, A. J.  
**African** Treasure.....Cobban, J. M.  
**After** all.....Whitby, B.  
**After** Cost.....Edge, K. M.  
**After** His Kind.....Henderson, M. S.  
**After** Long Waiting.....Nicholson, J.  
**After** Sedgemoor.....Pickering, E.  
**After** Twenty Years.....Sturgis, J.  
**Aftermath**.....Dene, N.  
**Aftermath** ('Kentucky Cardinal II.') Allen.  
**Aftertaste**.....Reade, C.  
**Afterwards**.....Maclaren, I.  
**Against** Odds.....Lynch, L. L.  
**Against** the Pikes.....Tench, M. F. A.  
**Against** the Tide.....Dickens, M. A.  
**Against** the Tides of Fate.....Barry, J. A.  
**Agatha** Page.....Henderson, I.  
**Agatha** Webb.....Green, A. K.


 Books in this Catalogue for Sale, see p. xx.

Fig. 5. The first page of fiction listed by title in Mudie's 1907 catalogue. At the time the catalogue was printed, most of the works included in this list had been published roughly within the past twenty-five years.



# FICTION Part II UNDER AUTHORS

Novels and Collections of Stories in one volume form  
arranged alphabetically under names of Authors.

- AARON, Dr. E. M.**  
The Butterfly Hunter.
- Abbot, Mrs. C. L.**  
The Wanderer.
- Abbott, Angus Evan.**  
The Gods Give My Donkey Wings.
- Abbott, Edwin A.**  
Silanus the Christian.
- Abbott, J. H. M.**  
Plain and Veldt.
- A'Beckett, Arthur.**  
Tracked Out.  
Hard Luck.
- About, Edmond.**  
Tolla.  
Lawyer's Nose.  
A New Lease of Life, &c.  
The Greek Brigand. } Same  
The King of the Mountains. } book.  
The Fellah.  
Trente et Quarante.
- Acebal, Francisco.**  
Face to Face: Dolorosa.
- Achard, Amédée.**  
The Golden Fleece.
- Ackworth, John.**  
The Minder.  
The Coming of the Preachers.  
From Crooked Roots.
- Acland, The Hon. Lady.**  
The Lost Key.
- 'Adalet.'**  
Hadjira.
- Adams, Andy.**  
The Log of a Cowboy.  
A Texas Matchmaker.  
The Outlet.  
Cattle Brands: Stories.
- Adams, Arthur H.**  
Tussock Land.
- Adams, E. C.**  
The Bow and the Sword.
- Adams, Ellinor Davenport.**  
Colonel Russell's Baby.  
Comrades True.  
Robin's Ride.  
Miss Secretary Ethel.
- Adams, Francis.**  
John Webb's End.  
Australian Life.  
The Melbournians.  
A Child of the Age.
- Adams, Frederick Upham.**  
The Kidnapped Millionaires.  
John Henry Smith.
- Adams, Rev. H. C.**  
Balderscourt.  
Barford Bridge.  
Boy Cavaliers.  
Charlie Lucken.  
Cherry Stones.  
College Days at Oxford. } Same  
Wilton of Cuthberts. } book.
- Adams, Rev. H. C.—continued.**  
Ernest Hepburn.  
Fighting His Way.  
First of June.  
For James or George.  
Hairbreadth Escapes.  
In the 15.  
The Mystery of Beechy Grange.  
School-boy Honour.  
Swain the Sleeper.  
School and University.  
Tales Illustrating Church History.  
Tales Upon Texts.  
Who Did It?  
Wroxby College.
- Adams, Mrs. Leith (Mrs. De Courey Laffan).**  
Madelon Lemoine.  
My Land of Beulah.  
Aunt Hepsy's Foundling.  
Geoffrey Stirling.  
Louis Draycott.  
Bonnie Kate.  
A Garrison Romance.  
The Old Pastures.  
The Peyton Romance.  
Colour-Sergeant, No. 1 Compy.  
Accessory After the Fact.  
The Prince's Feathers.  
Cruel Calumny.  
What Hector had to say.  
The Dream of Her Life.  
The Vicar of Dale End.
- Adams, Mary.**  
Confessions of a Wife.
- Adamson, John.**  
Mumford Manor.
- Adcock, A. St. John.**  
Beyond Atonement.  
East End Idylls.  
In the Image of God.  
In the Wake of the War.  
The Consecration of Hetty Fleet.  
The Luck of Private Foster.  
More than Money.  
In Fear of Man.  
Love in London.
- Adderley, Hon., & Rev. James.**  
Paul Mercer.  
Stephen Remarx.
- Adeler, Max.**  
Out of the Hurly Burly.  
Elbow Room.  
Random Shots.  
An Old Fogey.  
Captain Bluit.  
In Happy Hollow.  
The Quakeress.
- Adkin, J. H. Knight.**  
The Woman-Stealers.
- Agnew, Georgette.**  
Marianna.  
The Countess.


 Books in this Catalogue for Sale, see p. xx.

Fig. 6. The first page of fiction listed by author in Mudie's 1907 catalogue. This list includes what the preface refers to as "the names and works of the popular novelists of the Victorian and present era."

## FICTION

## PART III.

A SELECTION OF STANDARD AND RECENT NOVELS CLASSIFIED HISTORICALLY, TOPOGRAPHICALLY, AND TOPICALLY . . . . . p. 676

## INDEX TO CLASSIFICATION.

Subjects are arranged in the following alphabetical order.

- |                             |                                     |                                |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Aerial Adventure</b>     | <b>Australia</b>                    | <b>England</b>                 |
| <b>Africa, Central</b>      | Bush Life                           | Historical                     |
| <b>Africa, North</b>        | Mining                              | Wars                           |
| Algeria                     | Social Life                         | Military Life                  |
| Morocco                     | New South Wales                     | Political Life                 |
| Sahara                      | Queensland                          | University Life                |
| Somaland                    | Victoria                            | <b>Counties and Towns</b>      |
| <b>Africa, South</b>        | <b>Austria-Hungary</b>              | London                         |
| Political Romance           | Historical                          | Early History                  |
| Colonial Life               | Local Life                          | Plague and Fire                |
| Hunting                     | <b>Belgium</b>                      | Fashionable 18th Century       |
| Mining                      | Historical                          | Early 19th Century             |
| Native Life                 | <b>Biblical</b>                     | Bohemian and Art Life          |
| Transvaal                   | <b>Bohemia</b>                      | City and Financial             |
| <b>Africa, West</b>         | <b>Brittany</b>                     | East End and Slum              |
| Madagascar                  | <b>Bulgaria</b>                     | Humour                         |
| Mauritius                   | <b>Burma</b>                        | Journalistic                   |
| <b>Alps</b>                 | <b>Canada</b>                       | Music Hall                     |
| Health Resorts              | Historical                          | Political and Parliamentary    |
| <b>America, Central</b>     | French                              | Social and Fashionable         |
| <b>America, North</b>       | Hudson's Bay                        | Social and Financial           |
| Wars                        | Klondyke                            | Suburban                       |
| College and University Life | New Brunswick                       | <b>Epistolary</b>              |
| Commercial Life             | Newfoundland                        | <b>Europe</b>                  |
| Diplomatic Life             | Nova Scotia                         | Historical                     |
| Humour                      | Ranch Life                          | Pseudo-Political Romance       |
| Indian Life                 | Social Life                         | <b>Finland</b>                 |
| Military Life               | <b>Ceylon</b>                       | <b>Forecasts</b>               |
| Mining                      | <b>Channel Islands</b>              | Military                       |
| Negro                       | Jersey                              | Naval                          |
| Railway Life                | <b>Child Life</b>                   | Political and Revolutionary    |
| States and Towns            | <b>China</b>                        | Utopian                        |
| <b>America, South</b>       | Anglo-Chinese Life                  | <b>France</b>                  |
| Argentina                   | Boxer Rebellion                     | Historical                     |
| Banda Oriental              | Native Life                         | Wars                           |
| Brazil                      | <b>Chivalry: Legend and Romance</b> | Modern Social                  |
| Chile                       | <b>Convict, Prison Life</b>         | <b>Paris</b>                   |
| Colombia                    | <b>Corsica</b>                      | Historical                     |
| Gulana, British             | <b>Cuba</b>                         | Commune                        |
| Paraguay                    | <b>Denmark</b>                      | Artist Life                    |
| Peru                        | <b>Detection of Crime</b>           | Social                         |
| <b>Anarchism</b>            | Murder and Burglary                 | Americans in                   |
| <b>Ancient History</b>      | Impersonation                       | Literary and Musical           |
| Assyria and Babylon         | Lady Detectives                     | Military Life                  |
| Atlantis                    | Jewel Robbery                       | Vosges and Alsace L.           |
| Carthage                    | Political Crime                     | <b>Germany</b>                 |
| Stone Age                   | Secret Service                      | Historical                     |
| <b>Animal Stories</b>       | Poisoners                           | Wars                           |
| <b>Arabia</b>               | Swindlers and Forgers               | Local and Social               |
| <b>Arctic</b>               | <b>Egypt</b>                        | Pseudo-Political Romance       |
| <b>Armenia</b>              | Ancient                             | <b>Greece</b>                  |
| Turkish Atrocities          | Modern                              | Ancient                        |
| <b>Artist Life</b>          |                                     | Wars                           |
| <b>Asia, Central</b>        |                                     | Local, Peasant                 |
|                             |                                     | <b>Holland and Netherlands</b> |
|                             |                                     | Historical                     |
|                             |                                     | Local                          |
|                             |                                     | William the Silent             |


 Books in this Catalogue for Sale, see p. xx.

Fig. 7 (see also the image below, which is on a facing page to the above in the catalogue). The index to Mudie's classification of fiction by subject, 1907.



**Hospital and Medical**

Doctors' Tales  
Experiments  
Madness and Asylums  
Mental Diseases  
Nursing World

**Humour**

Dialogues  
Parodies  
Various

**Iceland**

Sagas  
Local Life

**India**

Historical  
Mutiny  
Border Wars  
Anglo-Indian  
Eurasian Life  
Native Life  
Folk Lore and Legends

**Ireland**

Historical  
Local and Social  
Peasantry  
Dublin

**Italy**

Historical  
Local and Social  
Florence  
Naples  
Rome City  
Sicily  
Tuscany  
Venice

**Rome, City**

Anglo-Roman Life  
Political and Clerical  
Native Life

**Japan**

Anglo-Japanese  
Native Life

**Java****Jews**

Historical  
Ghetto and Modern

**Literary and Journal-  
istic****Malaya****Mediterranean**

Gibraltar  
Malta  
Levant  
Monte Carlo

**Mexico**

Historical  
Local Life

**Musical World****Mysterious and Marvel-  
lous**

Pseudo-Scientific

**New Zealand**

Local Life  
Maories

**Norway**

Historical  
Local Life

**Occultism**

Black Magic  
Dreams and Visions  
Dual Personality  
Ghosts and Hauntings  
Hallucinations  
Hypnotism and Mesmerism  
Reincarnation  
Spiritualism  
Supernatural and Psychic  
Theosophical

**Palestine**

Local Life  
Zion

**Persia****Poland**

Historical  
Local Life

**Polynesia and South  
Seas****Portugal****Religious and Clerical**

Catholics and Proselytism  
Denominational, &c.

**Roumania**

Local and Peasant Life

**Russia**

Historical  
Wars  
Political and Social  
Revolutionary and Peasant  
Secret Societies and Nihilism  
Siberia and Exile Life

**Scotland**

Historical  
Aberdeenshire  
Edinburgh  
Fifeshire  
Forfarshire  
Galloway  
Glasgow  
Highlands  
Islands  
Local Life, General

**Sea, Life**

Merchant Service  
Naval Yarns  
Piratical

**Servia****Socialism****Social Problems**

Capital and Labour  
Cruelty to Children  
Dipsomania  
Morphinomania

**Spain**

Historical  
Local Life

**Sport**

Athletics  
Boxing  
Coaching  
Cricket  
Cycling  
Golf  
Hunting  
Motoring  
Racing  
Yachting

**Stage and Theatrical  
Life****Sweden**

Historical  
Local Life

**Switzerland**

Health Resorts  
Historical  
Local Life

**Syria**

Historical  
Local Life

**Tasmania****Turkey**

Balkan States  
Constantinople  
Local and Native Life

**Tyrol****Wales**

Historical  
Local Life

**West Indies**

Historical  
Hayti  
Local Life  
Negro Life

**Woman**

College and Teaching  
Shop Life and Service  
Marriage and Divorce  
Temperament and Evolution

**Detection of Crime.****Murder and Burglary—continued.**

- Luck of Bella Barton.....Appleton, G. W.  
 Man of the Hour.....Magnay, Sir W.  
 Margaret.....Meade, L. T.  
 Martin Hewitt Investigator.....Morrison, A.  
 Mayfair Magician (*Hypnotism*).....Griffith, G.  
 Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes.....Doyle, A.  
 Michael Dred.....Leighton, M. and E.  
 Midnight Special.....Delannoy, B.  
 Miss Arnott's Marriage.....Marsh, R.  
 Motor Pirate.....Paternoster, G. S.  
 M.R.C.S.....Delannoy, B.  
 Mr. Quixley of the Gate House.....Brebner, P.  
 My First Crime.....Mace, G.  
 Mysterious Miss Cass.....Appleton, G. W.  
 Mystery of Clapsed Hands.....Boothby, G.  
 Mystery of the Royal Mail.....Farjeon, B. L.  
 Night of Reckoning.....Barrett, F.  
 Passenger from Scotland Yard.....Wood, H. F.  
 Playing the Knave.....Warden, F.  
 Powers That Prey.....Flynt and Walton.  
 Prisoner's Secret.....Leys, J. K.  
 Purple Head.....Pugh, E.  
 Queer Affair.....Boothby, G.  
 Red Triangle.....Morrison, A.  
 Return of Sherlock Holmes.....Doyle, C.  
 Rickerby's Folly.....Gallon, T.  
 Rosebury (*Village Tragedy*).....Meade, L. T.  
 Sacrilege Farm.....Hart, M.  
 Secret Way.....Fletcher, J. S.  
 Seven Secrets.....Le Queux, W.  
 Shadow of the Rope.....Hornung, E. W.  
 Sign of Four.....Doyle, A. C.  
 Silent Watchers.....Russell, D.  
 Silver Pin.....Barrett, A. W.  
 Sins of the City.....Le Queux, W.  
 Stillwater Tragedy.....Aldrich, T. B.  
 Stories from Scotland Yard.  
 Strange Disappearance of Lady Delia. Tracy.  
 Studio Mystery.....Aubrey, F.  
 Sunbeam.....Godfrey, Mrs. T.  
 Thérèse Raquin.....Zola, E.  
 Thief in the Night.....Hornung, E. W.  
 Three Exploits of M. Parent.....Lermina.  
 Three Glass Eyes.....Le Queux, W.  
 Trail of the Dead.....Robinson and Fraser.  
 Two Men from Kimberley.....Baker, H.  
 Underground Mystery.....Sherard, R. H.  
 Unto the Third Generation.....Shiel, M. P.  
 Unwise Virgin.....Kernahan, Mrs. C.  
 Viking's Skull.....Carting, J. F.  
 Way of Cain.....Dunn, A.  
 Weaving the Web.....Mee, H.  
 White Witch of Mayfair.....Griffith, G.  
 Whose Was the Hand?.....Muddock, J.  
 Woman Martyr.....Diehl, A. M.  
 World's Finger.....Hanshaw, T. W.  
 See also Novels by Donovan, D.  
 See also Novels by Du Boisgobey, F.  
 See also Novels by Gaboriau, E.  
 See also Novels by Green, A. K.  
 See also Novels by Griffiths, Major A.  
 See also Novels by Hawthorne, J.  
 See also Novels by Hill, H.

**Detection of Crime.****Murder and Burglary—continued.**

- See also Novels by Hume, F.  
 See also Novels by Lynch, L. L.  
 See also Novels by Marsh, R.  
**Impersonation.**  
 Evil that Men Do.....Shiel, M. P.  
 In Mid-Atlantic.....Delannoy, B.  
 John Chilcote, M.P.....Thurston, K. C.  
**Lady Detectives.**  
 Dora Myrl, Lady Detective.....Bodkin, M.  
 Dorcas Dene, Detective.....Sims, G. R.  
 Experiences of Loveday Brooke.....Perkis, C.  
 Scoundrel or Saint.....Warden, G.  
**Jewels, Bank Robbery, &c.**  
 Adventurers.....Watson, H. B. M.  
 Adventures of Lady Pearl Broker.....Maxwell.  
 Albert Gate Affair.....Tracy, L.  
 Aunt Bethia's Button.....Randal, J.  
 Black Tortoise.....Viller, F.  
 Cardinal Moth.....White, F. M.  
 Celestial Ruby (*Mystery*).....Speight, T. W.  
 Danver's Jewels.....Cholmondeley, M.  
 Diamond of Evil.....Whishaw, F.  
 Diamonds.....Fletcher, J. S.  
 Dictator's Daughter.....Jepson, E.  
 Doom of Siva.....Speight, T. W.  
 Drexel Dream.....Mackenzie, W. A.  
 Falkners of Greenhurst.....Middlemass, J.  
 Green Eye of Goona.....Morrison, A.  
 His Majesty's Peacock.....Mackenzie, W. A.  
 Instigator.....Treeton, E. A.  
 Iron Hand (*Bank*).....Cobban, J. M.  
 Jewel Mysteries.....Pemberton, M.  
 Lady and the Burglar.....Turner, E.  
 Lagden's Luck.....Gallon, T.  
 Marathon Mystery.....Stevenson, B. E.  
 Mask.....Le Queux, W.  
 Memoirs of Constantine Dix.....Pain, B.  
 Moonstone.....Collins, W.  
 Motor Cracksmen.....Carey, C.  
 My Strangest Case.....Boothby, G.  
 New Mrs. Lascelles.....Meade, L. T.  
 Outlaws.....Little, C.  
 Pagan's Cup.....Hume, F.  
 Rancee's Rubies.....Bourchier, H.  
 Rook's Nest.....Appleton, G. W.  
 Sign of the Stranger.....Le Queux, W.  
 Something in the City.....Warden, F.  
 Tear of Kalee.....Inman and Aspdon.  
 Terror by Night.....Cobban, J. M.  
 Tragedy of the Great Emerald.....Chesney, W.  
 Under Cloister Stones (*Treasure*).....Knight, A.  
 Whitewash.....Mumford, E. W.  
 Yellow Diamond.....Sergeant, A.  
**Political Crime and Secret Service.**  
 Ambassador's Glove.....Machray, R.  
 Betrayal.....Oppenheim, E. P.  
 Black Shadows.....Fenn, G. M.  
 Blow Over the Heart.....Machray, R.  
 Broken Fetter.....Leys, J. K.  
 Confessions of Ladies' Man.....Le Queux, W.  
 Crime of the Century (*Pigott*).....Donovan, D.  
 Czar's Spy.....Le Queux, W.


 Books in this Catalogue for Sale, see p. xx.

Fig. 8. The first part of the "Detection of Crime" fiction in Mudie's 1907 catalogue. Note that Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* is listed under the subcategory of "Jewels, Bank Robbery, Etc."



## America, North—continued.

## Oregon.

Mary Bray x her Mark (Backwoods) *Taylor, J.*

## Pennsylvania.

Chronic Loafer.....*Lloyd, N.*  
Circumstance.....*Mitchell, S. W.*  
Dr. Lavendar's People.....*Deland, M.*  
Dr. of Philosophy (*Negro Quest. Pa.*) *Brady, C.*  
Drone and a Dreamer.....*Lloyd, N.*  
Far in the Forest.....*Mitchell, S. W.*  
Hecla Sandwith.....*Valentine, E.*  
New Ohio.....*Hale, E. E.*  
Old Chester Tales.....*Deland, M.*  
Sidney.....*Deland, M.*  
Soldier of the Valley.....*Lloyd, N.*  
Tangled up in Beulah Land.....*Mowbray, J.*  
Tillie.....*Martin, H. R.*

## Rockies.

Mistress of the Ranch.....*Clark, F. T.*

## Southern States, General.

Celeste.....*Downe, W.*  
Horace Chase.....*Woolson, C. F.*  
Jupiter Lights.....*Woolson, C. F.*  
Open Question.....*Raimond, C. E.*  
Otto the Knight.....*Thanel, O.*  
Red Rock.....*Page, T. N.*  
Speckled Bird.....*Wilson, A. E.*  
Voice of the People.....*Glasgow, H.*

## Tennessee.

Master Word.....*Hammond, L. H.*  
Waters of Caney Fork.....*Read, O.*  
See also Novels by *Craddock, Charles E.*

## Texas.

Aunt Huldah (*Ranch Life*) *Cooke & MacGowan*  
Dr. Forenti (*Galveston*).....*Grimshawe, H.*  
Egyptian Tragedy (& other Stories).....*Savage.*  
Gone to Texas.....*Hughes, T.*  
Open Boat.....*Crane, S.*  
Outlet (*Cowboys & Cattle*).....*Adams, A.*  
Rules of the Game.....*Pocock, R.*  
Sailor Tramp (*Tramp Life*).....*Kennedy, B.*  
Texas Matchmaker.....*Adams, A.*  
Through the Mill.....*Rux.*

## Utah.

Mormon Prophet.....*Dougall, L.*  
Study in Scarlet.....*Doyle, A. C.*

## Virginia.

## Colonial Life.

Audrey (18th C.).....*Johnston, M.*  
By Order of the Company (16th C.) *Johnston.*  
Fortunes of Oliver Horn.....*Smith, F. H.*  
Heart's Highway (17th C.).. *Wilkins, M. E.*  
John Vytal (1587).....*Payson, W. F.*  
King Noanett.....*Stimson, F. J.*  
Old Dominion (17th C.).....*Johnston, M.*  
Vivian of Virginia (17th C.).....*Fuller, H.*  
Wooing of Judith (1648).....*Kennedy, S. B.*

## Social Life, Modern.

Battle-Ground (*Civil War*).....*Glasgow, E.*  
Captain's Toll-Gate.....*Stockton, F. R.*  
Col. Carter of Cartersville.....*Smith, F. H.*

## America, North.

## Virginia, Social—continued.

Deliverance.....*Glasgow, E.*  
Gentleman of the South.....*Brown, W. G.*  
Henry Bourland.....*Hancock, A. E.*  
In Ole Virginia (*Negro*).....*Page, T. N.*  
New Americans.....*Hodder, F.*  
Old Dominion.....*James, G. P. R.*  
On Newfound River.....*Page, T. N.*  
Sketches from Old Virginia.....*Bradley, A. G.*  
Tanis, the Sang-Digger.....*Rives, A.*

## Washington (City).

## Local and Political Life.

See Diplomatic, p. 678.

## Washington (State).

Mariella of Out West (*Puget S.*) *Higginson, E.*

## Western States.

## Ranch and Frontier Life.

My Host the Enemy (*Montana, &c.*) *Calkins.*  
Quest of John Chapman.....*Hillis, N. D.*

## Wyoming.

Lin McLean (*Ranching*).....*Wister, O.*  
Virginian (*Cowpuncher*).....*Wister, O.*

## AMERICA, SOUTH.

## Political &amp; Revolutionary Romances.

## Argentina.

El Ombú (*Gauchos, 1808*).....*Hudson, W. H.*  
Story of an Estancia.....*Crampton, G.*  
With Bought Swords.....*Fowler, H.*

## Banda Oriental.

The Purple Land.....*Hudson, W. H.*

## Brazil.

Despoilers (*Rio de Janeiro*).....*Mitchell, E.*  
His Chief's Wife.....*D'Anethan, Baroness.*  
King of the Dead (*Interior*).....*Aubrey, F.*  
Magic of the Desert.....*Williams, W. S.*  
Stimson's Reef.....*Hyme, C. J.*  
Tales of the Pampas.....*Balfin, W.*

## Chile.

For the Rebel Cause.....*Crouch, A. P.*  
In Strange Company.....*Boothby, G.*  
Princess of Vascovy.....*Oxenham, J.*  
Senorita Montemar.....*Crouch, A. P.*

## Colombia.

Nigel Fortescue.....*Westall, W.*

## Guiana, British.

## Adventures.

Devil Tree of El Dorado.....*Aubrey, F.*  
In Guiana Wilds.....*Rodway, J.*  
Zorg.....*Kirke, V.*

## Paraguay.

Dream of Freedom.....*Nisbet, H.*

## Peru.

Harlequin Opal.....*Hume, F.*  
Inca's Treasure (*Mining*).....*Glanville, E.*  
Romance of Golden Star.....*Griffith, G.*  
Virgin of the Sun (1527).....*Griffith, G.*


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Fig. 9. Rather than being classed with other British detective fiction, Arthur Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* is here listed as a "Utah" novel, within the larger "America, North" category, on account of the novel's setting.



## England—Continued.

## Yorkshire, Local and Rural—continued.

- George's Georgina.....Rennison, R.  
 Ground Ivy.....Swan, Myra.  
 Jabez Easterbrook (*Methodism*).....Hocking, J.  
 Labyrinth (18th C. *Gentlefolk*).....Gilchrist, R.  
 Luck of Barerakes.....Marriage, C.  
 Mary Anerley.....Blackmore, R. D.  
 Men of North Sea (*Dogger B. Fishers*).....Wood.  
 Miss Miles.....Taylor, M.  
 Mistress B. Cunliffe (*Wool Tr.*, '25).....Sutcliffe.  
 Mr. Elliott (*Industrial*).....Ford, I. O.  
 Old Bank.....Westall, W.  
 Paradise Row (*Leeds*).....Wintle, W.  
 Plunder Pit.....Snowden, K.  
 Put Yourself in his Place (*Sheffield*).....Reade, C.  
 Romance of the Moors.....Caird, M.  
 Sylvia's Lovers (1796).....Gaskell, Mrs.  
 Tales of Yorkshire Wolds.....Snowden, K.  
 Thompson's Progress (*Bradford*).....Hyne, J. C.  
 Unstable as Water.....Needell, Mrs. J. H.  
 Winds of Cathridd.....Coleridge, C.  
 Wuthering Heights.....Brontë, E.  
 Yorkshire Cousins.....Wyke, S.  
 See also Novels by Brontë, C.  
 See also Novels by Fletcher, J. S.  
 See also Novels by Linskill, M.  
 See also Novels by Sutcliffe, H.

## Epistolary.

- Another Eng. Woman's Love Letters.....Pain.  
 Australian Girl in London.....Mack, L.  
 Confidences.....M. C. and G. de S. W.  
 Englishman's Love Letters.....Crosland, T.  
 English Woman's Love Letters.....Housman, L.  
 From a Davos Balcony.....McLaren, A.  
 Garden of Contentment.....Mordaunt, E.  
 Gift from the Grave.....Wharton, E.  
 Grandmother's Advice to Eliz.....Trowbridge.  
 Letters from her Mother to Eliz.....Trowbridge.  
 Letters to Dolly.....Howard, K.  
 Love's Cross Currents.....Swinburne, A. C.  
 Lover's Replies to Eng. Woman's L. L.  
 Matilda's Mabel.....Lyons, A. N.  
 Missing Answers to Eng. Woman's L. L.  
 Rosa Amorosa.....Egerton, G.  
 Visits of Elizabeth.....Glyn, E.

## EUROPE.

## Historical.

- Edward the Exile (11th C.).....Davidson, M.  
 Fond Adventures (*Medieval*).....Hewlett, M.  
 'God Wills It' (1st Crusade 1094).....Davis.

## Pseudo-Political Romances.

- Accused Princess.....Upward, A.  
 Advent. Princess Sylvia.....Williamson, Mrs.  
 Arms and the Woman.....McGrath, H.  
 Beverly of Graustark.....McCutcheon, G. B.  
 Bindweed.....Blissett, N. K.  
 Caprices of a Royal Incognita.  
 Cardinal's Rose.....Van Sutphen, T.  
 Circassian.....Roberts and Montesole.  
 Count Zarka.....Magnay, Sir W.  
 Garden of Lies.....Forman, J. M.  
 Gay Conspiracy.....Chambers, R. W.

## Europe—Continued.

## Pseudo-Political Romances—continued.

- Graustark.....McCutcheon, G. B.  
 King of Alberia.....Davetrey, L.  
 Long Live the King.....Boothby, G.  
 Modern Mercenary.....Prichard, K. and H.  
 Prince to Order.....Wayne, C. S.  
 Princess Cynthia.....Bryant, M.  
 Queen's Quandary.....Gordon, S.  
 Rulers of Kings.....Atherton, G.  
 Savrola.....Churchill, W. S.  
 Secrets of the Courts.....Upward, A.  
 Temporal Power.....Corelli, M.  
 Traitors.....Oppenheim, E. P.  
 Weaver of Webs.....Ozenham, J.  
 Whirligig.....Lindsay, M.  
 See also *Germany*, p. 705.

## FINLAND

- By a Finnish Lake.....Waineman, P.  
 Heroine From Finland.....Waineman, P.  
 Lovers at Fault.....Whishaw, P.  
 Song of the Forest.....Waineman, P.  
 Squire Hellman (*Local*).....Aho, J.

## FORECASTS.

## Military.

- Coming Conquest of England.....Niemann, A.  
 Coming Waterloo.....Cairnes, Capt.  
 Final War.....Tracy, L.  
 Great War in England ('97).....Le Queux, W.  
 Invaders.....Tracy, L.  
 Pro Patria.....Pemberton, M.  
 Sack of London, Great French War ('01).

## Naval.

- Captain of the Mary Rose.....Cloves, W.  
 Crafty Foe (*Submarines*).....Nisbet, H.  
 Foundered Galleon (*Submarines*).....Chesney.  
 New Trafalgar.....Curtis, A. C.  
 Next Naval War.....Wilmot, E.  
 Seaward for the Foe.....Hill, H.  
 Unpardonable War.....Barnes, J.  
 When War Breaks Out.....Wilson and White.

## Political, Scientific and General.

- American Emperor.....Tracy, L.  
 Angel of the Revolution } .....Griffith, G.  
 Olga Romanoff }  
 End of an Epoch.....Green, A. L.  
 For England's Sake.....Cromie, R.  
 Fourth Napoleon.....Benham, C.  
 Great Peril.....Cloves, W. L.  
 Lake of Gold (*Aërial, &c.*).....Griffith, G.  
 Looking Backward.....Bellamy, E.  
 Looking Forward.....Thiuse, I.  
 Lord of the Sea.....Shiel, M. P.  
 Mercia, Astronomer Royal.....Mears, A.  
 My After Dream.....West, J.  
 Napoleon of Notting Hill (*Satire*).....Chesterton.  
 News from Nowhere.....Morris, W.  
 Next Crusade.....Cromie, R.  
 Queen of the World.....Netterville, L.  
 Red Leaguers (*Irish Rebellion*).....Bullock, S. F.  
 Three Days' Terror.....Fletcher, J. S.  
 Time Machine.....Wells, H. G.  
 War of the Sexes.....Young, F. E.  
 War of the Worlds.....Wells, H. G.


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Fig. 10. Along with Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and "Novels by Brontë, C.," Elizabeth Gaskell's *Sylvia's Lovers* is included in the 1907 catalogue as a "Yorkshire, Local and Rural" novel.



**England, Historical—continued.**

**George II, 1727—continued.**

**Jacobite Rebellion, 1745.**

Denounced.....*Burton, J. B.*  
Fierceheart the Soldier.....*Snaith, J. C.*  
For White Rose of Arno.....*Rhosecomyl, O.*  
Lost Laird.....*Muddock, J. E.*  
Macdonald Lass.....*Tytler, S.*  
Netherdyke.....*Charleton, R. J.*  
Ricraft of Withens.....*Sutcliffe, H.*  
Spanish John.....*McLennan, W.*  
Under the White Cockade.....*Sutcliffe, H.*  
Waverley.....*Scott, Sir W.*  
Where Honour Leads.....*Francis, M.*

**George III, 1760.**

**Life in the Navy.**

Admiral (*Nelson and Nile*).....*Sladen, D.*  
Fortune's My Foe.....*Burton, J. B.*  
Friend of Nelson.....*Hutchinson, H. G.*  
King's Yard (*Portsmouth, 1780*).....*Jeffery, W.*

**Social and Political Life.**

Barnaby Rudge.....*Dickens, C.*  
Bernicia (*Methodist Revival*).....*Barr, A.*  
Broom Squire.....*Gould, S. B.*  
Castle Inn.....*Weyman, S.*  
Children of the Abbey.....*Roche, R. M.*  
Evelina.....*Burney, F.*  
Fatal Gift.....*Moore, F. F.*  
Griffith Gaunt.....*Reade, C.*  
Idol of the King.....*Curties, H.*  
In the Shadow of the Purple.....*Gilbert, G.*  
Lady of the Regency.....*Ransom, Mrs. S.*  
Lake of Wine.....*Capes, B.*  
Love Like a Gipsy.....*Capes, B.*  
Loves of the Lady Arabella.....*Searwell, M.*  
My Lady Peggy Goes to Town.....*Mathews, F.*  
On Turnham Green (*Highwaymen*).....*James, C.*  
St. Ives.....*Stevenson, R. L.*  
St. Katherines by the Tower.....*Besant, Sir W.*  
Shoes of Fortune.....*Munro, N.*  
Twisted Eglantine (*Regency*).....*Watson, M. B.*  
Vicar of Wakefield.....*Goldsmith, O.*  
When Rogues Fall Out.....*Hatton, J.*  
Yeoman Fleetwood (*Regency*).....*Frances, M. E.*  
See also Novels by *Austen, Jane.*  
See also Novels by *Peacock, T. L.*  
See also Novels by *Thackeray, W. M.*

**Peninsular War.**

Adventures Harry Revel (*& Smuggling*).....*'Q.'*  
Bivouac.....*Maxwell, W. H.*  
Castle in Spain.....*Capes, B.*  
Fortunes of Hector O'Halloran.....*Maxwell.*  
Hundred Days.....*Pemberton, M.*  
Hussar.....*Gleig, G. R.*  
King's Own Borderers.....*Grant, J.*  
Phantom Regiment.....*Grant, J.*  
Shadow of the Sword.....*Buchanan, R.*  
Sons of the Sword.....*Woods, M.*  
Subaltern.....*Gleig, G. R.*

**Waterloo.**

Alice Lorraine.....*Blackmore, R. D.*  
Charles O'Malley.....*Lever, C.*  
Fleur de Camp.....*Campbell, A. G.*  
Follies of Capt. Daly.....*Connell, F. N.*

**George III., Waterloo—continued.**

Great Shadow.....*Doyle, A. C.*  
In the Year of Waterloo.....*Caine, O. V.*  
Romance of War.....*Grant, J.*  
Royal Rascal.....*Griffiths, A.*  
Stories of Waterloo.....*Maxwell, W. H.*  
Vanity Fair.....*Thackeray, W. M.*  
Vengeance is Mine.....*Balfour, A.*  
Waterloo.....*Erckmann-Chatrian.*

**Threatened Invasion.**

Franks, Duellist.....*Pratt, A.*  
Springhaven.....*Blackmore, R. D.*

**Queen Victoria, 1837.**

**Victorian Wars.**

**Crimean War.**

Beatrice and Benedick.....*Smart, H.*  
By Celia's Arbour.....*Besant, Sir W.*  
Interpreter.....*Melville, W.*  
Lady Wedderburn's Wish.....*Grant, J.*  
Laura Everingham.....*Grant, J.*  
Lord Hermitage.....*Grant, J.*  
One of the Six Hundred.....*Grant, J.*  
Ravenshoe.....*Kingsley, H.*  
Thin Red Line.....*Griffiths, A.*  
To Punish the Czar.....*Hutchinson, H.*  
Under the Red Dragon.....*Grant, J.*  
V.C.....*Murray, D. C.*  
Vera.....*Dempster, C. H.*

Indian Mutiny & Border Wars, see India.

**Egyptian Campaigns.**

**Arabi Revolt.**

Four Feathers (1882).....*Mason, A. E. W.*  
Under the Rebel's Reign.....*Neufeld, C.*

**Soudan.**

Charles Franklyn (1886).....*Hasmbib.*  
Four Feathers.....*Mason, A. E. W.*  
One of the Grenvilles (1897).....*Lysaght, S.*  
Order of Isis (1897).....*Stubbs, J.*  
Zone of Fire (1886).....*Hill, H.*

**South African Wars.**

**Native Wars.**

**Fall of Lobengula.**


Triumph of H. Blachland.....*Mitford, B.*  
Trooper Peter Halket.....*Schreiner, O.*  
Word of the Sorceress, '78-79.....*Mitford, B.*

**Boer War, 1881.**

Cease Fire.....*Cobban, J. M.*  
Jess.....*Haggard, H. R.*

**South African War, 1899-1902.**

Abraham's Sacrifice.....*Janson, G.*  
Aletta.....*Mitford, B.*  
Beautiful Rebel (*Looting, &c.*).....*Glanville, E.*  
Belforts of Culben.....*Mitchell, E.*  
Burgher Quixote.....*Blackburn, D.*  
Cashiered.....*Balfour, A.*  
Commandant.....*Glanville, E.*  
Dangerous Quest.....*Young, F. E.*  
Derwent's Horse.....*Rousseau, V.*  
Despatch Rider.....*Glanville, E.*  
Driscoll, King of Scouts.....*Hales, A. G.*  
Empire Makers.....*Nisbet, H.*  
Fighter in Khaki.....*Rodd, R.*

 **Books in this Catalogue for Sale, see p. xx.**

**Fig. 11.** Novels written during a range of time periods are grouped as novels about "George III, 1760" on this page of the 1907 catalogue.

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